

STEPHAN DAHMEN

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# REGULATING TRANSITIONS FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

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AN INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY  
OF ACTIVATION WORK IN ACTION

**BIELEFELD** UNIVERSITY PRESS

Stephan Dahmen  
Regulating Transitions from School to Work

*To Julius*

**Stephan Dahmen**, born in 1982, is a postdoctoral researcher at the Faculty of Educational Science at Universität Bielefeld, Germany. His current research covers organizational ethnography in human service organizations and education, social inequalities in education and work, the transformations of contemporary youth and childhood and qualitative research methods.

Stephan Dahmen

# **Regulating Transitions from School to Work**

An Institutional Ethnography of Activation Work in Action

**[transcript]**

This work was accepted by the Faculty of Educational Science at Bielefeld University as a Dissertation with the same title.

Examiners: Prof. Dr. Holger Ziegler; Prof. Dr. Jean-Michel Bonvin

I acknowledge support for the publication costs by the Open Access Publication Fund of Bielefeld University.

This work received support by the European Commission under the Marie Curie Initial Training Network Education as Welfare (grant number 238646, 7 Framework Program).

### **Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>



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First published in 2021 by Bielefeld University Press.

An Imprint of transcript Verlag

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<http://www.bielefeld-university-press.de>

Cover layout: Maria Arndt, Bielefeld

Printed by Majuskel Medienproduktion GmbH, Wetzlar

Print-ISBN 978-3-8376-5706-7

PDF-ISBN 978-3-8394-5706-1

<https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839457061>

Printed on permanent acid-free text paper.

# Contents

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<b>1. Introduction</b>	9
<b>2. Youth, Education and the Welfare State</b>	17
2.1 How Institutions Structure the Youth Phase	20
2.1.1. Regimes of Youth Transitions	21
2.1.2. Welfare State Typologies, Educational Systems, and Transitions from School to Work	23
2.1.3. The Comparative Political Economy of Skill Formation	25
2.2. Situating the Swiss Transition Regime	27
2.2.1. Virtues and Vices of Apprenticeship-Systems	31
2.2.2. Mechanisms that Lead to Inequalities	35
2.3. The Politics of VET in Switzerland and the Emergence of Transition Measures	39
2.3.1. The Apprenticeship-Crisis and the Rise of Youth Unemployment in the Early Nineties	39
2.3.2. Reforms in the Unemployment Insurance for Young People	42
2.3.3. The new VET-Act and the Popular Initiative on the Right to Vocational Training	46
2.4. Excursus: Collectivist Skill Formation Systems and the Right to Education	53
2.4.1. The Emergence of Transition Management and the Birth of Transition Policies	58
2.4.2. Individual Counseling and the Early Identification of Risk-Groups	60
2.4.3. Standardizing the “Matching” Process	60
2.4.4. Transition Measures and the Promotion of a “Fast” Transition from School to Work	62
2.4.5. Interinstitutional Collaboration and the Rise of Educationfare	65
2.5. From the Emergence of a Problem Towards the Construction of a Policy	67
2.5.1. Contradictions of the Swiss Transition Regime	68
2.5.2. Discursive Shifts: From Youth Unemployment to “Youth at Risk”	70

<b>3. Life-Course, Biography and Social Policy</b>	
The Social and Political Regulation of the Youth Phase .....	75
3.1. The Life-Course as an Institutional Program and a Subjective Construction .....	80
3.1.1. Life-course, Biography and Institutionalized Individualism .....	81
3.1.2. From Positions and Sequences to Identities over Time .....	82
3.1.3. Rationalization, Normalization and Social Control of the Life-Course: Temporal Patterns and the "Autonomous" Individual .....	85
3.1.4. The Paradoxes of Individualization and the Politics of the Individual .....	87
3.2. The Organizational Regulation of Biographies .....	93
3.2.1. Human Service Organizations as Life-Course "Gate-Keepers" .....	94
3.2.2. People Processing and People Changing Institutions .....	97
3.2.3. Human Service Organizations as Discursive Environments for Self-Construction .....	98
3.2.4. Human Service Organizations as Subjectivation Devices .....	102
3.2.5. Towards an Analysis of Subjectivation Processes in Human Service Organizations .....	106
<b>4. Analyzing Activation in Action</b> .....	113
4.1. Street-level Bureaucrats, Institutionalized Organizations and People Processing Organizations .....	116
4.1.1. Overcoming the Implementation-Control-Discretion-Narrative .....	118
4.1.2. From Street-level Bureaucrats to Human Service Organizations .....	120
4.1.3. Human Service Organizations and their Institutionalized Environments .....	124
4.1.4. (De-)coupling and Organizational Fields .....	124
4.1.5. From Organizational Fields to Contradictory Institutional Logics .....	127
4.1.6. From Institutional Logics to Competing Orders of Worth: The Sociology of Conventions .....	133
4.1.7. Organizations as Devices for Complex Coordination: Conflicts and Compromises in Human Service Organizations .....	144
4.1.8. Human Service Work in the Light of the Sociology of Conventions .....	146
4.1.9. Conclusion: Applying Convention Theory for the Analysis of Human Service Work .....	151
<b>5. Methodology, Research Design and Data Collection</b> .....	153
5.1. A Focus on Activation Practices .....	153
5.1.1. Research design and data collection .....	158
5.1.2. Interviews, "Everyday Work Stories" and Participant Observation .....	160
5.1.3. Analysis of Documents and Texts .....	166
5.1.4. Data Analysis Strategies .....	171

<b>6. Results</b> .....	177
6.1. A Short Introduction to Motivational Semesters .....	177
6.1.1. Motivational Semesters as Complex Devices of Coordination .....	183
6.1.2. Contradictory Logics and their Practical Compromises .....	184
6.2. Conflicts Between Orders of Worth and situated Compromises in Human Service Work: The Case of Sanctions .....	191
6.2.1. The Institutional Script of the Sanctioning Procedure .....	192
6.2.2. From Rules to their Implements: The Local Interpretation of Sanctioning Rules .....	195
6.2.3. The Grey Sphere of Acting "Below the Conventions" .....	202
6.3. Gate-keeping and the Negotiation of Employability: The Intermediary Function of Motivational Semesters .....	208
6.3.1. Exclusion Through Sorting Out .....	209
6.3.2. Flexibilising Job Aspirations .....	212
6.3.3. Dealing with Disappointed Expectations and the (Re-)Construction of Viable Job Aspirations .....	216
6.3.4. "Selling" Young Persons to Employers: A Process of Valuation and Mediation..	218
6.4. Constructing the Client that Can Create Himself: Technologies of Agency and the Production of a Will .....	225
6.4.1. Constructing Viable Job Choices Through Guided Self-Exploration .....	226
6.4.2. Negotiating the Integration Contract .....	229
6.4.3. Private Problems Becoming Public Issues .....	233
6.4.4. Modulating Distance to Accommodate for the Pitfalls of the Contract .....	234
6.4.5. Subjectivation Practices: Valuation and the Preparation to the Conventional Demands of the Labor-Market .....	237
6.5. "Making Up" Viable Future Selves Through Evaluation – Working with the Portfolio-Tool .....	239
6.5.1. Elements of the Portfolio .....	241
6.5.2. Linking the administrative-temporal order of the Motivational Semester with practices of Self-Exploration .....	242
6.5.3. Individual Self-Exploration and the Invocation of Individuality .....	243
6.5.4. Self-Assessments as Tools for Self-Discovery .....	244
6.5.5. Panoptical Evaluation and Self-Improvement .....	245
6.5.6. Biographical Self-Scrutiny and the Continual Limitation of the Space of Possibilities .....	248
6.5.7. Linking the Biographical to the Structural: Learning to Describe Oneself in the Evaluative Vocabulary of the Labor-Market .....	250
6.6. Guided Self-Exploration as a "Narrative Machinery" that Produces Intelligible Subjects .....	251
6.6.1. Activating a Biographical "Care" for the Self .....	252



<b>7. General Conclusion and Discussion of Main Results</b> .....	255
7.1. Organizations as the “Missing Link” for the Mediation Between Systemic Requirements and Subjectivity .....	257
7.2. The institutional Production of Subjectivity:	
Biographisation – Valuation – Optimisation – Autonomisation .....	260
7.2.1. Biographisation.....	260
7.2.2. (E-)valuation and Mediation .....	262
7.2.3. Optimisation.....	264
7.2.4. Discretion and Invisible Work as a Precarious Precondition for Successful Coordination .....	265
7.2.5. Risks and Limits of Institutionalised Individualism: “Autonomy Gaps” in Welfare Policies .....	268
7.2.6. Subjectivation Practices Between Subjection and Enablement .....	272
<b>8. Bibliography</b> .....	277
<b>9. Annex</b> .....	309
Acronyms and Abbreviations .....	309
List of Figures and Tables .....	310

# 1. Introduction

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“The transition from youth to adulthood, is, however, not just a matter of how working-class young people see themselves. Their futures are ‘likely’ at least in part because of the categorizing work done by strategically-placed others. In a cumulative and complex process, different young people begin to experience life differently because of the resources and penalties that are distributed to them – on the basis of widely-shared categorizations such as rough/respectable, undeserving/deserving and unreliable/reliable – by those many significant others” (Jenkins 2002: 12).

Transition policies have undergone profound changes. In the wake of a “productivist reordering of social policy” (Lister 2003: 430), youth becomes a prime object of political attention and scrutiny. The early and fast integration of young persons into employment is mostly guided by the idea of preventing later losses of human capital, the idea of scarring effects of early unemployment on later income and the fear of welfare dependency of the younger generation. Investing in youth is mainly seen as an investment into the human capital of the future, as it “pays off” in terms of later monetary outcomes: As the European Commission youth guarantee scheme states, “preventing unemployment and inactivity, therefore, has the potential to outweigh these costs and as such represents an opportunity for smart investment in the future of Europe, its youth” (European Commission 2012: 8). Youth as a “smart” investment in the future discursively constructs youth as “citizen-workers” (Lister 2003) of the future and depicts the human capital of the future generation as a key impact parameter of the welfare state. This is reflected in the European youth guarantee scheme that serves as a prime example of a new type of transition policy that can be found (albeit with small differences) in different European member countries. These policies include at least four common features that have deep implications for the way life-course transitions are discursively and politically framed. They are underpinned by a series of normative assumptions and expectations about a young person’s social and economic activity. First, these schemes entail a conditionalization of benefits – or in the words of the European Commission – a strict coupling of “eligibility of social assistance

for youth at high risk of marginalization with a rigorous mutual obligation approach” (European Commission 2012: 118). Youth are conceived as rationally choosing actors that must be provided with the right incentives (carrots) and penalties (sticks) to enter work. Secondly, they often come with early tracking and monitoring devices for so-called “NEET’s” or “youth at risk” of dropping out. This early monitoring and profiling are part and parcel of a social investment approach that aims at “prepar(ing) [...] rather than repair(ing)” (Hemerijck 2018: 811) and thus requires to identify “youth” based on risk factors prior to the occurrence of a specific life-course-event. As such, potentially all young people facing the transition to work come into the gaze of transition policies. Thirdly, these schemes focus on the avoidance of “inactivity” through focusing on an encompassing inclusion of young unemployed in employment or education measures. For instance, the European youth guarantee scheme proposes that a concrete offer is made within four weeks of registration. Finally, these policies have a strong focus on individualized counseling and guidance (individualization). As an example, the European Network of Public Employment Services highlights the aim to strengthen their role of “career transition management” (ibid.: 8) in order to “equip jobseekers [...] with the knowledge and skills to make informed career transitions and take control of their career paths” (European Commission 2012: 23). This individualization discourse “encourages young people to ‘take charge of their biography’, build their employability through improving or consolidating their skills” (Antonucci/Hamilton 2014: 263) and amounts to a “political production of individualized subjects” (Crespo-Suarez/Serano Pacual 2007). The policy paradigm of “activation” thus comes with an emphasis on active citizenship, where young people are seen as both responsible for and able to achieve economic self-reliance. The increased focus on conditionality criteria, the stronger individualization of services, as well as the implementation of a contradictory mix of “client-centeredness” and “compulsion” (Lindsay/Mailand 2004: 196) are common characteristics of contemporary reforms of transition policies. These changes have serious implications for the conception of the youth phase. Transition policies, such as those described above take part in the “institutionalization” (Kohli 2007) of youth as a life-course phase through standardizing and normalizing its various phases “by means of age-based rules and norms as well as materialized institutions” (Närvänen/Näsman 2004; Kelle/Mierendorff 2013). Historically, the youth phase as an “educational moratorium” (Zinnecker 2001) emerged as a process of decommodification, scholarisation and the institutionalization of an age-hierarchy (Mierendorff 2010), these newer developments point to a structural change of the youth phase. Heinz Reinders pointedly describes this as a change from a “youth moratorium” to an “optimization moratorium” (Reinders 2016) where the efficient preparation of the labor market is the key concern. And in fact, transition policies are “life-course polices”, insofar they “provide(s) a framework of security, transition markers and entitlements (and) designs and monitors life scripts

as temporal sequences of legitimate participation in the different spheres of life” (Heinz 2014: 240). Transition policies such as the European youth guarantee scheme enforce new normality patterns and life-course scripts and regulate the inclusion and exclusion in various domains of social life. The avoidance of “inactivity” highlights re- rather than de-commodification, the preventive glance highlights an earlier confrontation with life-course-related expectations (such as career choice) and the rationalization and optimization of transitions potentially institutionalize new temporal (“the earlier, the better”) and normative (“you are in charge of your biography”) expectations. While activation reforms, characterized by the shift of policy objectives from income protection to promoting participation in the labor market (van Berkel/Valkenburg 2007), have effects on all citizens, as newcomers on the labor market, young people are particularly affected by them (Antonucci/Hamilton 2014: 26; Crespo Suarez/Serrano Pascual 2004). This applies particularly to so-called “youth guarantee” schemes: different to a “welfare right” attributed on the basis of citizenship status, youth guarantee schemes are based on a “citizen-worker of the future” (Lister 2003) model, that legitimizes paternalism for the sake of later life-course productivity. The idea of a “guaranteed” offer often becomes – due to a lack of viable alternatives – “an offer you can’t refuse” (Lodemel/Trickey 2000). The title of this book, “Regulating transitions from school to work” reflects the fact that youth as a life-course phase is regulated through transition policies that institutionalize specific life-course patterns. However, these patterns do not simply – as described above – “regulate(s) the movement of individuals through their life in terms of career pathways and age strata” (Kohli 1986: 272), they also become active in terms of “biographically relevant actions by structuring their perspectives for movement through life” (ibid.). The regulation of transitions is not restricted to the external enforcement of specific entry-requirements, age and structurally available career pathways. It goes deeper as setting norms and involves specific practices of self-formation. This process of regulation unfolds itself through shaping “biographical perspectives and plans” (Kohli 2007: 254). In this context, Elder speaks of a “loose coupling” of individual life-conduct and societal structural conditions (Elder 1994: 10). The regulation of transitions happens in concrete sites (schools, counseling agencies, public employment services), and involves specific actors and gate-keepers (parents, teachers, social workers, employers). As Heinz states in a seminar paper on gate-keeping and the regulation of the life-course, the opening of a status-passage requires that a person is defined according to membership criteria of a particular organization: “A student has to “become” a high or low achiever in order to receive counseling concerning his or her placement in a status passage leading to an academic or a vocational career” (Heinz 1993: 13). Processes of categorization and classification based on legal and administrative norms, expectations of other organizations, or based on institutionalized practices play a central role in these processes. Regulating life-courses on a practical level thus requires “people

processing” and “people changing” activities (Hasenfeld 2010), that aim explicitly at changing and forming identities, subjectivities, and self-understandings and often imply more or less explicit forms of social control. This is reflected in a specific conception of transition research that undergirds this thesis and that implies a focus on the specific practices implied in regulating transitions. This perspective bears similarities with Anselm Strauss concept of “trajectory”, focusing “not only the physiological unfolding of a patient’s disease but the total the total organization of work done over that course, plus the impact on those involved with that work and its organization” (Strauss et al. 1985: 8, read patients disease as “transition”). The need for this specific perspective on the “regulation” of transitions is accentuated by the qualitative research literature on activation, which has highlighted activation as a new form of production of neoliberal subjectivity (Dean 1995, Darmon/Perez 2011, Andersen 2007). This research highlights those “practices of self-formation” (Dean 1995: 567), involved in the making of employable subjects mostly based on Foucault’s theory of subjectivation. In fact, the institutional program of activation comes with a new rationality of governing the unemployed that – in comparison to old forms of social control stressing conformity and disciplinary power (for example the poor house), highlights self-responsibility, empowerment and individual agency of citizens. As Rose puts it, “governing in a liberal-democratic way means governing *through* the freedom and aspirations of subjects rather than in spite of them” (Rose 1998: 155, emphasis added). Perhaps the most striking example of this new form of governing the unemployed is the contractualisation of services, in which citizens are asked to individually negotiate “integration contracts” with state agents. The idea of the contract corresponds exactly to the idea of the citizen of the advanced liberal state that acts as a morally self-responsible person, autonomously setting goals for oneself, equipped with a strong will and able to comply with its self-set goals. In this context, Robert Castel has coined the term “negative individualism” to designate situations where the contractual matrix “demand(s) or indeed dictate(s) that impoverished individuals behave like autonomous persons” (Castel 1995: 449). Similarly, for Born and Jensen, the growing use of contracts between the state and its citizens constitutes a new societal rationality of governing people “that institutionalizes new expectations to the subjects, namely that they are to be reflexive and responsible for themselves” (Born/Jensen 2010: 328) and that aim at the “transformation of the poor into self-sufficient, active productive, and participatory citizens” (Cruikshank 1999: 69). As activation aims at promoting the desirable self-regulation of citizens, a micro-sociological analysis of the “practices” of activation appears as the most promising approach to analyze the core features that make up the “active” welfare state. The aim of the present research is to “open up” the Black Box of implementation of activation policies into concrete practices. Nevertheless, the concept of implementation is at risk of portraying the process of policy delivery in an under-complex way: commonly understood as those local

front-line activities that serve to pursue policies designed elsewhere (in the high level suites of politicians and administrators), it pays no attention to the fact that “activation in action” takes place in an organizational context crowded with different competing demands for action, a complex mosaic of accountability and a multiplicity of possible goals (of which the formal goals of a policy to be implemented is only one). As Cooney describes, the process of implementation has to be conceived as a “highly contentious process enacted by knowledgeable actors who engage, reject, and at times transform the value-laden structures in which they are working” (Cooney 2007: 687). Therefore, I prefer the idea that policies are “translated”, and in doing so, potentially re-interpreted and adapted to local contingencies and task-requirements. In a certain way, this research rather takes “A view from the street” (Manning/Maanen 1978) than from the “suites” and takes as a starting point the practices on a central “site” of activation.

This book examines how activation is enacted in human service organizations for young person’s not in education and employment and aims at contributing to a better understanding of how transitions are regulated in and through practices of activation. The principal empirical material used are interviews conducted with frontline agents responsible for the implementation of young persons in the transition from school to their first employment – in this case- apprenticeships. While each of these interviews is a micro-sociological account of practice, they are analyzed as situated and embedded within a web of different social relations. In this research, frontline agents are neither conceived as “rational fools” (Sen 1977) that rationally adapt to the local constraints and restrictions in order to get their work done with the least effort possible, nor or they conceived as “cultural dopes” (Garfinkel 1967) that act based on unquestioned, habitualised norms and structural or organizational constraints. They are, as Boltanski/Thévenot put it, equipped with a “critical capacity” (Boltanski/Thévenot 1999: 359) to voice criticism, to produce justifications in order to support their criticisms and to operate skillfully with legal and cultural norms and rules of acceptability that operate within the field of activation services. They act, as Seo and Creed put it, as “partially autonomous actor situated in a contradictory social world” (Seo/Creed 2002: 230). That is the reason why – following the “methodological situationalism” (Diaz-Bone 2011: 49) of the sociology of conventions – this research attempt to analyze the situated application and interpretation of rules and cultural norms and describe how they prefigure (and not predetermine) specific practices.

This book is structured into seven chapters. The second chapter describes the organization of the education-occupation link in Switzerland and it’s outcomes on a young person’s transitions from the perspective of the theory of skill regimes and of life-course theory. It introduces the Swiss VET-System, describes the political course of events that led to the introduction of so-called “transitions measures” and analyzes the discursive framing of “problematic” youth transitions within the

Swiss political arena. The chapter gives a short comparative appraisal of transition policies in the three collective skill formation systems of Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. It shows how the category of “at-risk youth” has emerged and how new discursive patterns of interpretation of the youth unemployment issue become institutionalized. Chapter three introduces a theoretical toolbox that shows how institutions frame life-courses both on the level of an “institutional program” as well as on the level of subjective, biographical action orientations. It reviews how the framing of life-courses by welfare and educational institutions has been conceptualized in life-course theory and describes the role of human service organizations for the transmission of macro-institutional life-course programs towards biographical action orientations on the micro-level of the individual. Three concepts are presented that each focus on a specific dimension of the regulation of life-courses and biographies. The concept of “gate-keeping” describes how human service organizations act both as facilitators and selection devices for specific life-course transitions. The concept of people changing institutions highlights the categorization work of human service organizations, their interdependency with their organizational environment and the impact of such processes on the trajectories of clients. The last, concluding part of this chapter describes human service organizations as “subjectivation devices”, links the Foucauldian concept of “subjectivation” with the concept of biography and describes how human service organizations can be conceived as discursive environments for self-construction. Chapter four critically situates the scope of analysis of human service organizations within different organizational theories: Lipsky’s conception of street-level bureaucrats, neo-institutionalist organizational theory and the conception of organizations as “compromising devices” (Thévenot 2001a: 410) by the economy of conventions. In line with this theoretical approach, I argue that in order to analyze “activation in action” on the frontline level, one has to break both with an over-coordinated view of organizations focusing on bureaucratic rules, shared representations and common cultures as well as with approaches that overemphasize rational adaptation of frontline staff to ambiguous policy prescriptions. Based on the sociology of conventions, I propose to analyze how actors deal with the critical tensions that result from the complex organizational make-up of the Motivational Semesters. Chapter five describes the methodology, data collection, and analysis. It describes initial research design choices and translates the theoretical insights of the previous section into concrete methodological steps. A special focus is put on the analysis of documents and their integration into the overall research framework and a description of how and why this research can be understood as an institutional ethnography. Chapter six is an empirical chapter that describes the research results. Here, the focus of inquiry shifts from the level of policy programs to the level of frontline implementation of a specific transition measure (The Motivational Semesters). The regulation of the life-course is analyzed on the level of a specific organization of the

Swiss transition system. The final chapter reviews and discusses the main results, situates them within the field of existing research and outlines the contribution of this thesis for the different theoretical discourses.





## 2. Youth, Education and the Welfare State

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Historically, the youth phase goes back to the institutionalization of a modern life-course, as a “pattern of socially defined, age-graded events and roles” (Elder, 1999: 302). Life-course patterns (childhood, youth, adulthood, old age, pre-work socialization phase, working phase, post-occupational phase) are established culturally around and through the occupational sphere, and function as a coordinating system for orientation. Historically, the emergence of “youth” is thus linked to the development of the modern life-course as it emerged in the industrial society – and coincided, according to Kohli and Meyer (1986) to state politics that introduced obligatory schooling and social retirement insurance. This led to the work-based distinction between childhood/youth, adulthood and old age, thus to a tripartite life course, which consists of the preparation for work, working, and retiring from paid work. The youth phase as a life-course phase came into being during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the socio-structural breakthrough of industrial capitalism. The demand for a skilled labor force leads to the increased exemption from work and to the de-location of the social “space” of youth from the factory to the school. This development is historically documented through the establishment of child labor-legislation and the general implementation of obligatory school age. The youth phase being dependent on specific historical structural preconditions raises the question of how the phase of youth changes and is structured nowadays. Youth can be conceived as a socio-historical constituted life-course phase, which is traditionally marked by a “moratorium<sup>1</sup>”, exempted from wage-labor and devoted to experimentation, education and free-time activities. The specific make-

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1 While the notion of “Moratorium” is consistently referred to in Eriksons developmental stages Theory, and defined as a period in which a temporary deviation from commonly accepted norms is legitimate (Erikson 1965), we do not focus on the youth moratorium as an outcome of bio-psycho-social development processes, but analyse it as “social fact” in the sense that is both sustained by specific social institutions, and that it is subject to social and economic change and whose character and form is interspersed with the interests of different actors. Youth as such is a “discursive struggle field” (see e.g. Dahmen/Ley 2016; Zinnecker 2003) and should not be reduced to biological and psychosocial development tasks.

up of youth as a life-course phase is not an ontological fact, but goes back to specific institutional arrangements: youth as a life-course phase has to be seen as a social category, framed by particular institutions, especially education, the labor market and the family, and different social practices, such as getting educated, leaving home, finding a job and forming a family (Fornäs 1995: 3). Comparative research, often loosely building on Esping-Andersen's distinctions between different worlds of welfare has pointed to the fact that the institutional determinants of youth transitions (and the youth phase) highly differ within different "transition regimes" (Walther 2006), institutionalized arrangements (Van de Velde 2008) ideal typologies (Cavalli/Galland 1995) or distinct "regimes of public action" in relation to education and skill formation (Verdier 2010). Furthermore, recent developments in comparative studies have more profoundly analysed the political economy of skill formation (Busemeyer/Trampusch 2011; Trampusch/Rohrer 2010) showing that social stratification patterns, the relative stability of educational institutions as well as the specific organization of the education-occupation link is dependent on the historical evolution of training institutions and their interlinkages with the economy, the welfare state, and specific political power arrangements. The easiest way to assess these differences within the institutional determinants of youth transitions is to follow Esping-Andersen's concept of de-commodification (Esping-Andersen 1990). The concept of de-commodification goes back to Esping-Andersen's seminal work on welfare state typologies, but it is equally valuable when analyzing education and training regimes (see e.g. Busemeyer 2015). The notion of de-commodification is related to the Marxian notion of commodification, and it describes the extent to which citizens have to rely on selling their labor power and rely on the market for maintaining a livelihood (Esping-Andersen 1990). In Esping-Andersen's theory, a high degree of de-commodification is given when welfare state citizens receive welfare state benefits based on welfare rights that lessen their dependence on the market. This concept has, among others been used by Cecile van de Velde, who, in her comparative study of transitions to adulthood, asks the simple question: who, the state, the market or the family is in charge of the period between obligatory schooling and the labor market? (van de Velde 2008). The welfare system and the educational system play a central role in the institutionalization of the modern youth phase, as they define age-limits and entry requirements for certain educational and professional pathways. A thorough analysis of the Swiss transition system as those "relatively enduring features of a country's institutional and structural arrangements which shape transition processes and outcomes" (Smyth et. al 2001: 19), should thus start with an analysis of these features. The concept of de-commodification is also of value for analyzing the specific organization of educational systems. Marshall, in his seminal article on the concept of citizenship,

counts the right to education as a “genuine social right of citizenship”<sup>2</sup> (Marshall 1950: 25). Despite the main differences between education and the welfare state (the fact that the classical welfare state has developed as a tool to counter the negative effects of the market, while education is not designed to compensate income loss) the concept of de-commodification can be applied to educational systems. Is education seen as a tradeable good or as a right and entitlement? As a matter of fact, youth do not have the same social citizenship rights as adults. Depending on the welfare state arrangement in question, youth are seen as (more or less) dependent on their parents and many benefits are only indirectly accessed through their parents. The fact that age-criteria regulates access to many social benefits shows that young people are not full social citizens (Jones/Wallace 1992). This also shows that the transition to employment is seen as the prime marker to independence and marks the transition to full citizenship status, at least in employment-centered welfare states. Tom Chevalier identifies (Chevalier 2016) and empirically applies (Chevalier 2017) two ideal-typical figures of youth social citizenship (whereas in his typology, social citizenship designates their access to income support/income replacement). Familialized citizenship is characterized by maintenance claims for children after majority age, late access to social benefits (after 20, around 25) and a developed family policy. Individualized citizenship is characterized by an early attribution of citizenship rights, early access to social benefits and a needs assessment of young persons independent from parent’s income. The latter is characteristic of Beveridgean welfare regimes, while the former is more common in familiarized, Bismarckian welfare regimes (Chevalier 2016: 4). Welfare regimes thus can be differentiated according to their attribution of an independent citizen status to their young persons, a status that is also condensed in the degree of familiarization and decommodification of each welfare arrangement. The youth phase as a moratorium depends thus on processes of de-commodification, in which concordantly – a right to basic education, legislation on child labor, an extension of institutionalized educational pathways – “frees” children and youth from the world of work. The welfare state plays a crucial role in this process of de-commodification: In theoretical terms, youth – as a life course phase devoted to education and preparation for entering the working world is dependent on specific social subsystems. Young

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2 Interestingly, Marshall derives this right not as right specific to children or youth, but as a tool to stimulate the future citizen in the making and to shape the future adult: “The right to education is a genuine social right of citizenship, because the aim of education during childhood is to shape the future adult. Fundamentally it should be regarded, not as the right of the child to go to school, but as the right of the adult citizen to have been educated” (Marshall 1950: 25). This quote shows how the institution of an obligatory school period is both an important pillar of the “institutionalized youth land” (Reynard/Roose 2014) as well as the expression of an intergenerational relationship between the adult generation and the growing up generation.

people (and children) are not brought into the world as “commodities”, ready to sell their labor-power, and they are – (within de-commodified subsystems) typically cared for in families, in (publicly financed) schools, or in historically established institutions (like the youth moratorium). The reproduction of labor-power necessarily happens in these decommodified spaces. State policies and more particularly social policies play a crucial role in this process: According to Offe (2006), one of the central functions of social policies to provide those “institutional facilities under whose aegis labor power is exempt from the compulsion to sell itself, or in any event is expended in ways other than through exchange for money-income” (ibid., own translation). This is not only a benevolent expansion of welfare rights but relates to the necessary reproduction of labor power. Certain reproduction functions (like care-work, socialization and education) thus require to be sustained by other systems than the market. These functions are mainly taken up by families, but schools, universities, etc. can be counted to these institutional facilities. According to Offe, the youth phase constitutes one of these institutionally legitimated “escape routes” (ibid., own translation), that is why, in times of economic recession – “the extension of the phase prior to entry into the labor market, so that there is a stretching of the phase of adolescence, either within the family system or, more often, through the institutions of the formal educational system” (ibid., own translation) is a (politically and individually) obvious solution.

## 2.1 How Institutions Structure the Youth Phase

The impact of different institutionalized arrangements on the youth phase – both in terms of their temporal elongation and their entry age into employment, as well as in terms of the subjective “experience” of the youth phase, has been highlighted by different comparative studies. Van de Velde (2008; 2013) shows – drawing on Esping-Andersen’s typology of welfare-regimes – the ways in which different institutional arrangements of de- and re-commodification yield very distinct outcomes on both structure and experience of the youth phase. Drawing on a mixed-methods study in six countries, Van de Velde posits that the prevailing experience of youth as a period in which one “finds oneself” (van de Velde 2008) – devoted to self-exploration, and in quantitative terms corresponding to an early exit from parent’s house paired with a long explorative period before definite entry on the labor-market corresponds to the institutional arrangement of the “social democratic” welfare state regime. The effects of the welfare state are essential in this case. In Denmark, serving as a study-case for Van de Velde, the “policy for young students or unemployed people institutionalizes the existence of a long and exploratory-character of the youth phase: a direct and universal assignation guarantees the economic survival of the young adult with independence from the family resources” (ibid.: 55). The

temporal elongation of the youth phase and its content thus seems to be linked to a specific educational and welfare regime, which in the case of social-democratic regimes – is characterized by an early and easy access to citizenship rights, generous subsistence sustaining benefits, and a system of educational grants which ensures high participation in higher education, independently of parent's income. In contrast, in the “liberal models” of the welfare state (for instance the UK) the youth phase is guided by an aspiration to early individual emancipation, in which the logic of “assuming oneself” (ibid.) prevails. An early entry in employment, the outcome of a university system based on private investments and loans, and access to social security benefits at the age of 18 highlighting individual self-sufficiency independently from parental resources are at the basis of this regime type. In the Southern European countries, characterized by a “familiarist” model – or in Esping-Andersen's typology- as a “sub-protective regime” and a weakly institutionalized welfare-system, access to (low) social security benefits exist only later in life. Accordingly, a strong dependency from the family exists. This leads to the fact that many young persons' transition experience amount to a feeling of “installing oneself” (ibid.: 57), in which the “transition” from youth to adulthood corresponds (differently than in UK and DK) to exiting the parents' house and accessing a job which allows economic independence. Similar findings are presented by Cavalli and Galland (1995) who identify that young persons in Italy may stay with their parents longer than in other countries, as due to the lack of a strongly institutionalized support system, the family presents a central role for the economic support of youth. In such a system, the entry age into employment is relatively high and accordingly, the economic independence from parents happens relatively late. On the contrary, in France, serving as an example of the “corporatist” regime type, transition experiences are, according to van de Velde, characterized by a semi-dependency of youth from the state and the family strongly devoted to studying and initial training, as these constitute entry requirements for the labor market and have a huge impact on the later career. France would correspondingly be a “hybrid” model due to it's relatively familiarist character<sup>3</sup>.

### 2.1.1. Regimes of Youth Transitions

Andreas Walther et. al (2006) develops a similar typology but pays more attention to the role of education systems and employment protection models. Based on the distinction of different welfare-regimes by Esping-Anderson (1990), further developed by Gallie and Paugam (2000), Walther develops a typology of transition regimes that covers similar aspects of Van de Velde's typology. Walther stipulates

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3 In France, access to social assistance is restricted to persons of 25 years of age compared to access to specific programs for young persons starting at the age of 18 in liberal regimes.

a concordance between institutionalized arrangements, conceptions of youth and biographical experiences. Walther delimits that universalistic welfare regimes correspond to a conception of youth that is based on personal development and youth's citizenship. Again, the generous training and employment benefits are the supporting pillars of such a conception, ensuring early independence from the family through de-commodification of the youth phase. In the same vein, southern European, sub-protective regimes come with a conception of youth without a distinct status compared to other countries. Walther et. al extend the regime typology by differentiating between concepts of "youth unemployment" and conceptions "disadvantage", "in terms of ascribing disadvantage to either "individual deficits" or "structures of segmentation" (Walther 2006: 125). According to Walther, "policies also depend on and reproduce context-specific notions of youth, reflecting the main societal expectations towards young people" (ibid.). While structure-related explanations for youth unemployment dominate in sub protective regimes, liberal regimes tend to ascribe responsibility to the individual. Walther (2007) extends his typology by a comparative assessment of different manifestations of active welfare-state reforms for young beneficiaries, showing that despite converging tendencies, huge differences remain within different regime types. We see that Walther's notion of transition regimes relates to the interplay of structures and cultural properties, in which certain "climates of normality" (Walther 2006: 45) gain validity as "considerable structuring power" (ibid.) for individual biographical orientations. As heuristic devices, they separate different patterns of institutionalized arrangements within the field of education, the labor-market, youth-employment policies and specific expectations pointed towards the young persons.

The importance of understanding the youth phase as embedded within different institutionalized arrangements, and more specifically, in terms of their "de-commodification" and "defamiliarisation" (van de Velde 2008: 112) comes from their considerable impact on the transition from school to work and to adulthood, especially for more vulnerable groups. The idea of a youth moratorium devoted to education and preparation for the sphere of work is closely linked to specific institutional arrangements. In an ideal-typological fashion, the idea of the youth moratorium as an exploration space seems to correspond to those regimes with a high degree of de-commodification, early and universal access to social rights which allows an early independence from family life and a preference for higher education, like for instance the universalist regimes in the Scandinavian welfare states. While institutional arrangements do not explain everything, this short excursus serves as an illustration as to what extent institutional arrangements play a role in understanding the characteristics of youth transitions. Institutionalized regimes, including processes (de)familiarisation" and (de)commodification also have important outcomes in terms of the autonomy of young persons. In the case of universalized regimes, the reduced pressure to sell one's labor-power and the reduced

need to draw back on parental resources opens up a larger space on exploration possibilities, while regimes with more familiarized elements, in which the early independence is not supported to the same extent, the necessity to draw back on the resources of the family may push people to take up employment earlier. While we must be cautious not to posit the “extended youth moratorium” as found ideal-typically in the Scandinavian countries as a normative blueprint, idealizing the early autonomy from parents and the universal access to subsistence sustaining benefits allowing higher educational participation, it is clear that the institutionalized patterns of welfare state arrangements – in leaving certain domains to the private, familiar sphere, others to the market sphere and again others to the sphere of the state – produce different patterns of disadvantage that play a crucial role for inequalities in the space of youth.

### **2.1.2. Welfare State Typologies, Educational Systems, and Transitions from School to Work**

While the last chapter has highlighted how different welfare state regimes shape the youth phase, the following chapter will explore how the transition from school to work differs according to different structural features of education and training systems. Following Heinz, institutional arrangements “influence passages from school to work by providing more or less organized pathways” (Heinz 2009: 392) for transitions. Heinz points the attention to “the linkages between markets, institutions and actors in which transition decisions are embedded” (ibid.: 393). This can be shown exemplarily by the differences in skill formation systems, in which dual-apprenticeship systems constitute highly distinguishable structural contexts for transition, in contrast to systems in which a majority of young persons are following a higher education pathway. These differences in the social organization of transitions do not only impact on the entry age of a specific cohort into employment, but comes with the attribution of a different status, a different socialization space (the “firm” vs the “university”) and with different cultural models of “standard” or “normal” transitions. As Heinz describes referring to differences between Germany and Great Britain, these models can be seen as “institutional arrangement(s) of time-and-space coordination” (ibid.: 395) which “regulate(s) the individual (life) course” (ibid.) and leads to a recognized occupation. While Heinz (2009) focusses on the impact of institutional determinants on differences within for instance the transition age of different cohorts, Verdier (2010) develops a catalog of questions for analyzing these institutional arrangements as spaces in which coordination between different actors (training institutions, employers, the state) proceeds based on different conventions. For instance, these different arrangements also come with different spaces in which a young person is asked to integrate oneself: (a professional community in dual apprenticeship systems, a hierarchical sys-



tem in school, etc...). The organization of individual trajectories can also depend on different modes of justification: (state-defined rules of selection, meritocratic status-competition), up to different approaches for the compensation of initial inequalities. Allmendinger and Leibfried (2003) showed that national specificities of education and training systems produce specific patterns of employment careers. They point our attention to the differences between the US (with a non-stratified comprehensive school system and a very low standardization of the education occupation-link) and Germany (being characterized by a stratified educational system and a very standardized transition to employment system). Markus Gangl elaborates on the structure of labor market entry in Europe and analyses cross-national differences within European countries. Gangl highlights the role of institutions in shaping the entry patterns of young people, distinguishing between an occupationalised labor market (OLM) and an internal labor market (ILM) system for the organization of the education occupation link. The former, amongst which education and training systems with VET-systems, are described as “arrangements allowing for a structured labor force integration in the sense of a strict educational channeling of individuals into positions and an immediate close match between qualifications and LM-positions” (Gangl 2003: 110). In contrast, labor market entry in ILM systems is described as “less tightly structured by education, less orderly, more amenable to career contingencies and discretionary employer behavior” (Gangl 2003: 110). Based on EU-LFS data on leavers from upper secondary education Gangl computes three country clusters: (1) a cluster of southern European countries comprising Italy, Greece, and Portugal, (2) a cluster of north-west European countries including Belgium, France, Ireland, the United Kingdom, but also Spain, and (3) a final cluster consisting of Austria, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands. Gangl describes that compared to the other country clusters, countries with a strong VET-system have very low unemployment rates amongst labor-market entrants. But, ten years after school leaving, there is remarkably little variation in unemployment rates between European countries. What differs between countries is the extent of “unemployment risk in the very first stages of careers and the time needed to arrive at the inherent unemployment level for workers of that country” (ibid.: 116). The southern European cluster distinguishes from the other European countries through low mobility rates in early career and higher unemployment rates especially for the lower educated. The clusters 2 (Belgium, France, Ireland, the United Kingdom - the “ILM”-countries) and 3 (Austria, Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands - the “OLM”-countries) can be distinguished by the fact that unemployment is not concentrated on market entrants (but rather on the lowest qualified) and by a “stronger tendency to hire workers for skilled jobs from external markets” (ibid.: 125). Apart from that, the “dispersion of status attainment with time in the labor force is lower and young people also tend to enter low skilled employment less often at the outset of their careers than is the case in

ILM contexts" (ibid.). Due to VET-countries specialized training credentials and a high degree of standardization, countries with a well-established VET system have a lower unemployment rate at labor market entry. The flip side of standardization is low job mobility as it is difficult to switch between occupations as the training is standardized according to occupational images (Kohlrausch 2012). This also means that initial training may determine one's occupation over a life-time. Leisering and Schumann (2003) show how the temporal structure of the life-course differs between the liberal, the conservative and the social democratic welfare regime. They also take account of the degree of stratification of the educational system and the degree of standardization of vocational training. Taking the German welfare state as an example, they show that conservative welfare state regimes combine a high stratification of an educational system and high standardization of the access roads to VET with a relatively low class and job mobility. The conservative welfare state "conserves" social inequalities – not only through the structure of welfare state benefits but also through a corresponding educational system.

### 2.1.3. The Comparative Political Economy of Skill Formation

In the previous chapter, we have seen that in the outcomes of different training regimes differ considerably in quantitative terms. This chapter explores the institutional characteristics of these training regimes through looking at some qualitative aspects of these regimes through the lens of the political economy of skill formation. As the focus of this book is vocational education and training, the chapter features comparative research on the institutional arrangement of VET-Systems. Switzerland, Austria and Germany are key examples of such regimes, characterized by a high involvement of employers and employer associations in the administration and financing and training and by the provision of portable, certified occupational skills (Thelen/Bussemeyer 2008: 7). The comparative political economy of skill formation approach highlights the links between regimes of human capital formation, regimes of welfare production (Iversen/Stephens 2008) and of production regimes (Hall/Soskice 2001). For instance, liberal regimes of skill formation like the US are characterized by the provision of general skills through higher education and by highly deregulated labor markets. This corresponds to a production model putting emphasis on mass production and radical product innovation. Coordinated market economies, in contrast, are characterized by strong vocational training institutions and of a generous welfare state that encourages individual investments in occupational skills. Collectivist skill formation systems, like Switzerland, Germany, and Austria focus on portable, certified occupational skills. This means that skills are transferable within the same sector and mostly lead to occupations protected by collective wage agreements. This, in turn, corresponds to an economy characterized by diversified quality production (Iversen/Stephens 2008) and by the

strong bargaining power of business interest organizations in the process of educational policy formulation. The theoretical approach of “varieties of capitalism” (Hall/Soskice 2001) explains the emergence of three worlds of human capital formation through historical differences in the organization of capitalism and party politics, defining both the modes of production of companies as well as the redistributive policies by the welfare state. This approach argues against the focus on de-commodification in current literature on the welfare state, stating that important dimensions of the welfare state (Estevez-Abe et. al 2001) rest on specific historical compromises between employers and workers – in which the role of skill-formation plays a crucial role. According to these authors, the “welfare-skill-formation nexus” (ibid.) is dependent on the incentives that different institutional arrangements give for workers to invest in firm and industry-specific skills (which favor the development of dual vocational systems) or in turn, to invest in general skills (as in systems with a high prevalence of tertiary education). According to Estevez-Abe et. al (ibid.: 150), as firm and industry-specific skills make workers more vulnerable and dependent on particular employers and market fluctuations, “workers will only make such risky investments when they have some insurance that their job or income is secure. Otherwise, they will invest in general, and therefore portable, skills” (ibid.). The institutionalization of labor-protection laws and high unemployment replacement rates would constitute a specific “incentive” to workers (and prospective workers) to invest in industry-specific skills. Employers would thus be in favor of a strong welfare state in cases in which their production model requires workers with skills gained through apprenticeships. Specific welfare state settings are explained by the need of employers to rely on a specific skill pattern. In the case of Switzerland, with a high degree of small and medium enterprises and a diversified quality production (Streeck 2001) in specific economic niches operating on a world market – these are firm-specific skills gained in a dual vocational training system. In this approach, institutional differences are thus not explained in terms of de- and re-commodification, political alliances or path-dependent developments of institutional arrangements based on political preferences (like most welfare state typologies do), but explains them through the mode of organization of the supply in skilled labor-force and the ways in which economic actors gain specific advantages through gearing their production model towards the availability of certain skill-patterns. This is strongly linked to the “production regime” (ibid.) that reigns in a certain country. If firms require more specific skills (because the production regime is based on diversified quality production), employers are willing to invest more in the skill formation of their employees and support generous welfare benefits and replacement rates, and tolerate high employment protection levels. If on the other side, a production regime is based on mass production, requiring more general skills (like the US), employment protection is low: “the absence of such institutions, in countries such as the US and UK, gives workers a strong incentive

to invest in transferable skills. In such an environment, it then also makes more economic sense for firms to pursue product market strategies that use these transferable skills intensely” (Estevez-Abe et. al. 2001: 146). The question is whether the majority of young persons maintains an employer-financed dual apprenticeship-system (with an early entry age in the labor market, a tight occupation-education link, and employers as main gatekeepers, and relatively strong collective bargaining and labor-protection) or if the majority of a cohort follows higher education, also depends on specific economic arrangements.

## 2.2. Situating the Swiss Transition Regime

How can the Swiss welfare state, and correspondingly the Swiss transition regime be classified according to the presented typologies? The notion of a coordinated market economy delineates that skill-supply is shaped by “joint committees, as constituted variously by employers’ associations, chambers of commerce, trade unions, works councils, educators, and public officials” (Piopiunik/Ryan 2012: 14). The German apprenticeship system is often invoked as a prime example of a collective skill formation system, involving at “sector/occupation level co-operation between employers’ associations and trade unions to determine training standards, and at district level between companies, chambers, trade unions, and educators to determine the eligibility of companies to offer training and of apprentices to become qualified, and at workplace level by companies and works councils to determine the size and content of particular training programs” (Busemeyer/Trampusch 2012). Collective skill formation regimes have three central characteristics: First “employers and their associations are heavily involved in the administration and financing of training, second, the systems provide portable, certified occupational skills” (Thelen/Busemeyer 2008: 7) and third, historically, employers’ interest in skills may lead to training regimes that evolve as ‘dual’ schemes. The specificity of collective skill regimes is that – in contrast with liberal skill formation regimes like the US or the UK, that the content, access, and provision of training is defined by these corporatist organizations. This practically corresponds to the situation in Switzerland. As the first article of the federal vocational act describes, vocational training is seen as a “common task of the federation, the cantons, and the organizations of the world of work” (Vet-act 2002<sup>4</sup>, own translation). While firms, through sector-specific organizations define the content of different vocational training professions, administer the admission to these professions and operate the certifications

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4 §1, Bundesgesetz vom 13. Dezember 2002 über die Berufsbildung (Berufsbildungsgesetz, BBG) SR412.10, henceforth: VPETA (Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act).

and tests, the federal-state supervises and sanctions the creation of new apprenticeships and overlooks that the certifications and content of training is constant throughout different firms and cantons. The fact that the federal state only sets general rules rather than intervening actively in the economic process refers to the “liberal corporatism” (Merrien 2001: 214), in Swiss vet-policies – the dual system works on a corporatist basis of consensus-building between the concerned professional groups and teaching institutions. Federalism leaves a large margin to cantons and to the professional organizations. Federal agencies (mainly the OPET<sup>5</sup>) set quality standards and pays subsidies to technical schooling institutions. The legal frame is set by the cantons. Firms are forced to respect guidelines in technical training, but as this is defined as a “common task”, neither the federation nor the cantons take a direct impact on the provision of apprenticeship places, which is fully left to the companies.

According to Stoltz and Gonon (2008), Switzerland can be described – alongside with Germany and Austria – as an employment-centered transition regime. The three-tiered school system, the dual system, and accordingly the relatively early educational tracking is characteristic of such a transition regime. Traditionally, and due to the specific organization of the education-occupation link through the dual-system, these regimes are characterized by a high degree of formalization and institutionalization in comparison to, for instance, under-institutionalized, southern European models. If we look at studies on the Swiss welfare state, the blunt classification of Switzerland as an employment-centered, continental welfare state alongside Germany and Austria might be too hasty. A deeper look into the literature on the position of Switzerland in welfare state-typologies shows that this classification is not self-evident. Armingeon (2001) describes that the Swiss welfare state made – from the 1970s on – a qualitative shift from a “liberal” or “residual” welfare state, characterized by low public-sector size, low social security transfers, and a comparatively late introduction of social security schemes towards a continental welfare state (see also Olbrecht 2013). The Swiss welfare state, with relatively high monetary benefits and a (historically) late but strong institutionalization of compulsory insurance schemes, in which social security is predominantly financed through contribution-based rather than tax-based system, structured around a male breadwinner model, indeed corresponds to the continental welfare state. On the other side, core features of the liberal regime-type remain: as Armingeon describes, “Switzerland is a continental European welfare state with a liberal face” (Armingeon 2001: 151). Administration of schemes is often left to private organizations (particularly in

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5 Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET), which in 2012 has been merged with the State Secretariat for Education and Research (SER/ SBF) into the SERI (State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation) and now are both part of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs.

the field of secondary education provision either through the corporatist model of the dual system, governed mainly by firms and their representative organizations or “private” professional schools for which pupils will have to pay). Also, other insurance systems show strong liberal traits, for instance the health insurance system or the pension system. Similarly, the strong administrative controls and relatively strict eligibility criteria and conditionality of benefits (particularly for younger unemployed) rather corresponds to the liberal regime type than to the continental one. Obinger argues that the specificities of the Swiss welfare state lie in the fact that the delayed development from a liberal to a continental welfare state has been inhibited by Swiss federalism which “geared the path of welfare state evolution in a more liberal direction but have also dampened social expenditures” (Obinger 1998). In fact, Bonoli shows that in OECD average, social expenditures spending as a percentage of GDP is closer to Italy and Greece than to Germany and France – while in all these countries the extent of contribution-based expenditures (vs tax-based) amount to the same percentage. The installation of compulsory insurance systems came with the continuous transfer of responsibilities from the cantons to the federal state, (Obinger 1998: 435), with a situation in which cantons either felt no obligation or no incentive to enhance social security, while the federal level was not empowered to do so. In fact, the political structure of Swiss federalism is far less developed than in other federalist continental states, (like for instance Germany and Austria) and should in Switzerland “be seen in a similar vein to that in Japan and the USA” (ibid). This point is also of crucial importance for the field of educational legislation, as we will see below.

While Stoltz and Gonon (2008) interpret the fact that the recent policy discourse is focusing on integrating young persons into the regular training system as an implementation of elements of a “universalistic regime type”, combining the same individualizing, compensatory measures and structure related labor-market policies (they cite the new vocational training legislation on the federal level as an example), we will see below that these “universalistic” elements are dampened by the negotiations in the federal arena. Firstly, the “universalistic elements” cited by Stoltz and Gonon are very distinct to those features existing in the classical universalistic countries. Especially the organization of the educational sector – and more particularly upper secondary education which is fully organized in a corporatist mode of coordination, has a very high involvement of the market. This would forbid to talk about a “universal” transition regime in a strict sense. Nevertheless, Stolz and Gonon strike an important point when describing that a political will towards integrating all young persons into the regular training system persists – The reform of the vet-act in the period between 2002-2004, as well as the discussions accompanying the apprenticeship crisis, may have led to the partial introduction of “universalistic elements”, introduced under political pressure by trade-unions, educational actors and players in the field of social assistance. Nevertheless, as

we will see below, these are dampened by and mediated through specific interest constellations. The specific political structure of Swiss federalism, as well as the distribution of responsibilities between the cantons and the federal state, led to a slowdown of reforms that aimed towards a stronger “universalization” of aspects of the Swiss transition system.

In trying to answer Van de Velde’s question: “who, the state, the market or the family is in charge of the period between obligatory schooling and the labor market?” (van de Velde 2013: 134), we get a good image of the place of the Swiss transition system in international comparisons. In comparison with continental welfare states, Switzerland has a relatively low share of state-led intervention in the transition period. Obligatory schooling – the legal age-phase in which young persons are under the auspices of state-provided universal education is 16. (Germany, for instance, has a “vocational training obligation” until the age of 18, while Denmark – as an example of a universalistic country, access to university is guaranteed through generous support for students). This is also an outcome of the fact that educational legislation is in the responsibility of the cantons, a fact that prevented federal regulations on the possible elongation of the obligatory schooling period<sup>6</sup>. This shows that Armingeon’s thesis that Swiss federalism has dampened the development of more universalist characteristics and led to the “liberal face” (Armingeon 1999) of the Swiss welfare state also applies to transition regimes. Upper secondary education is – despite a range of far-reaching reforms (see below) fully in the hands of employers and firms, with a very low level of state regulation, also in comparison to other countries with a dual VET-system. This system is clearly geared towards the market, as this quote from the federal office for professional training and technology shows: “Vocational education and training enables young adults to make the transition into the working environment and ensures that there are enough qualified people in the future. It is geared to the labor market and is part of the education

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6 It is only since the introduction of the article 62 in the Swiss constitution (the so called “educational article”) after popular vote in the year 2006 that the Swiss federation can – only in case that no harmonization by means of coordination between the cantons is possible – prescribe the legal school age. As will be shown later, within the parliamentary discussions on the failed attempts to introduce a right to vocational training (2001), proponents of the initiative pointed to the discrepancy that despite to the fact that a VET-degree has become a necessity for a successful working life, the school obligation period had, since the 1971 never been prolonged (see among others, the statement of Maya Graf in the proceedings 00.086 on the popular initiative “for sufficient VET-offer” on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2001). The SKOS (2007) In a position paper on young persons in social assistance, encouraged the introduction of an obligatory period of VET after obligatory training until the age of 18 (SKOS 2007: 7), a obligation that should then also be enforced by social assistance. These propositions were nevertheless never taken up.

system” (OPET 2006: 3, cited in Mayer 2009). This official definition shows that vocational education is primarily seen as a device for producing a qualified labor-force for the labor market. As Mayer states – in international comparison “market-economy driven vocationalisation is at its maximum here” (Mayer 2009: 29). As will be shown in a later chapter, even when compared to the two other ideal-typical collective skill formation regimes (Germany and Austria), the Swiss VET-system is particularly marketized. Austria has developed several school-based qualification paths that lead to a VET-diploma. In Germany, particularly in the new federal states state-intervention within VET is relatively high. As described in the previous chapter, in comparison to other continental welfare states with a dual VET-system, Switzerland seems to have maintained a more “liberal” character, also when it comes to familial responsibility for providing for their children and the role of the market for providing VET. This is highly relevant for the citizenship status of young people (Chevalier 2016, Jones 2008) and the degree of dependence/independence that is attributed to young persons, and translates into specific age-norms that structure the Swiss transition regime: In contrast to Germany where a compulsory attendance of professional school of 3 years after the obligatory school age exists for those youngsters that are not enrolled in a secondary school pathway after the age of 16, in Switzerland the compulsory school period stops at 15/16 years of age. In Switzerland, parental support is expected until 18 years but extends until children have terminated an upper secondary training (§ 277 Swiss civil code). Switzerland’s transition regime thus has a more familialist character in comparison to “universalist” transition regimes (for instance, Sweden or Denmark) in which “the right to social assistance applies to young people from 18 years old onwards regardless of the socio-economic situation of their families” (Walther 2006: 125). This familialist dimension has implications for social inequalities as well. According to the CSIAS/SKOS guidelines, social assistance covers training costs only if the parents are themselves dependent on economic support, and insofar the family budget is insufficient (even if the young person is older than 18 years) (Dubacher/Deschwander 2008: 18). There thus exists neither a formal obligation to take up upper secondary education, nor a formal right to an apprenticeship-position. While upper secondary education is increasingly seen as a prerequisite for a continuous working career, its realization is left at the responsibility of the young person and their family.

### 2.2.1. Virtues and Vices of Apprenticeship-Systems

The Swiss VET system (and apprenticeships training systems in general) is seen as a very successful model according to key success factors leading to relatively low youth unemployment rates (Ryan 2001). The 2-4 years of training on the job are tailored very closely to the firm’s needs, and as the supply of apprenticeship places



is fully dependent on the willingness to employers to train, skill mismatch is not a real issue. Furthermore, while firms have to invest a certain amount of time and money in training, apprentices can function as productive firm members for a relatively low wage: Hanhart and Bossio (1998) describe that from the perspective of the firm, the productivity of apprentices lies in most cases above the training costs from the second or the third year of training on. Secondly – and against the interests of bigger companies which would profit more from training schemes that are particularly geared towards the needs of the firm’s internal labor-markets – apprenticeships follow a standardized curriculum, established by industry organizations and controlled for by the federal state on the level of ISCED 3 qualifications that lead to a recognized certificate for professional qualification in a trade. Employers in a sector simply know what a car mechanic or a cook is able to do – this decreases employer’s insecurity in hiring processes and secures an industry/trade-specific mobility for workers, disposing of transferable skills on the level of a sector with relatively stable wage conditions linked to the different qualifications. As the theory of collective skill formation system describes, the *collective* dimension entails a compromise between the need of companies for “firm-specific skills” on the one side and the interests of workers for “transferable skills” – allowing them to not be dependent on one specific employer (Brusemeyer 2000)<sup>7</sup>. The apprenticeship system strikes a balance between these two dimensions – firms are required to “over-skill” their apprentices in relation to the skill needs of their company in order to comply with the federal regulations of professions. This is of benefit for the worker as they gain transferable skills that allow them a certain mobility within a sector. On the other side, this points to another aspect of “collaboration” and collective organization. The different firms of one sector have to share, at least to a certain extent, their production processes and the “know-how” when it comes to defining the industry/trade-specific curriculum of a profession. This situation is particularly beneficial for the young persons, who once entered the apprenticeship system, have gained skills which allow them certain labor-market mobility within their “trade”. These features lead to relatively smooth transitions to employment

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7 This is the reason why in the varieties of capitalism literature, patterns of investment in skills by workers corresponds to specific patterns of welfare state benefit generosity. CME’s provide highly specific skills - the market value of the skill is tied to a particular firm or industry. For the individual worker, it is riskier than investing in portable skills which will have more value when faced with future job insecurity. According to Iversen and Soskice (2009: 448), coordinated market economies (Germany, Switzerland, Austria) assure workers readiness to invest in specific skills (thus to enrol in apprenticeships) through a high degree of re-distribution through social transfers. As such there is a correspondence, a functional equivalence between the prevailing skill-regime and a specific Welfare state arrangement in this case, a “conservative” Welfare State.

for most young persons, relatively low youth unemployment rates and relatively secure jobs.

The organization of the education-occupation link as a dual apprenticeship system also comes with certain weaknesses, partly resulting from the same features that benefits in times of economic upturns. It is important to point to the fact that these “weaknesses” are strongly linked to the institutional features of the Swiss transition system: Due to the high investment of firms in specific skills, “employers develop strong stakes in overseeing the quality of potential employees (i.e. trainees) and developing clear job entry patterns [...] (and) monitoring the quality of the pool of the new school leavers” (Estevez-Abe/Iversen/Soskice 2001: 56). Employers organizations and employers thus have the interest to control the access to different apprenticeships. This happens in an indirect and direct way. Directly as selection of apprenticeship seekers and employers happens through application procedures like in the “normal” labor-market – indirectly as employers regulate the access through sector-specific standardized tests for youngsters who wish to apply for a specific apprenticeship, set the skill standards that lead to certified qualifications, and define the entry requirements (in terms of competences, skills and school level) for certain professions. These features make the Swiss VET-system a “strongly institutionalized” (Iversen and Stephens 2001) transition regime. This has also implications for the larger stratification of the obligatory school system: Busemeyer and Nikolai (2010) argue that early tracking and segmented secondary school system, characterized by limited possibilities to change track later on may be a “functional equivalent” to the vocational training system: “the firms’ willingness to invest in training hinges on the assurance that graduate apprentices remain with the training firm and do not wander off to higher education instead” (Busemeyer/Nikolai 2010: 501).

Potentially negative effects in terms of social stratification of such a strongly institutionalized transition regime are well documented in the literature. As obligatory school ends at age 15-16, thus at the level of lower secondary education, pupils will have to decide to either follow a general education school (leading to a matura) or follow a dual apprenticeship. The latter means that they apply for a 2-4-year apprenticeship position in a firm and follow 1-2 days of schooling per week and have to decide – at this point - for a profession. At the upper secondary level, 65% of all young people enroll in a VET program, while 25 % enroll in mostly general education matura schools (Stalder/Nägele 2011). The entry into a (dual) apprenticeship (vs. a general education program) is mediated by different factors. The type of lower secondary level school seems to play a central role for the differentials in transition rates to either a general education program, an apprenticeship or into “bridging offers”. As Hupka/Sacchi/Stalder (2006: 15) state, “we can see that students attending *Gymnasium* programs had much better chances to enter a post-compulsory education program. On the opposite, we find students from *Realschulen*, the academically

least demanding lower secondary programs. These young people have substantial problems getting an apprenticeship – and they also have little chances to enter an exclusively school-based program”. Researchers have identified a “stigmatization effect” (Meyer 2005, Meyer et. al 2003) for pupils from the lower school-types. Pupils from secondary school tracks “with low demands” enter, to a significantly higher degree, into apprenticeships that do not correspond to their intellectual level than students from lower secondary school tracks with higher demands, even if these students have the same PISA score in literacy skills.

The pathways to employment (and to an apprenticeship) are highly influenced by individual, ascribed and institutional factors. Pupils in the first year of vocational training in apprenticeships with lower skill demands and pupils who did not find an apprenticeship at all seem to not be very different in terms of PISA-skills. Whether a pupil enters directly into an apprenticeship or has to draw back on a transition measure depends not only on the level of educational achievement but also on “ascriptive” characteristics (Hupka et. al 2012: 212). Other institutional factors play a central role: when comparing different cantons, one sees that the number of students tracked into school tiers “with lower demands” correlates with the number of young persons in “transition measures”. Certain “cantonal school-systems ration educational offers at the obligatory level for certain groups of pupils, which then have to be compensated for through transition measures” (ibid.: 181). The simple fact of having visited a lower obligatory school track thus has – even when controlling for the effective PISA-competency level - an effect when it comes to selection processes at the level of the firm. Employers decide autonomously if they provide apprenticeships and to whom they provide apprenticeships. This means that they are the central gate-keeper for the entry into the apprenticeship system and for the later position of young persons in the labor market. These selection mechanisms play an important role for the transmission of inequalities (see for instance Imdorf et al. 2004; Imdorf 2010) particularly in SMEs, which apply a firm-specific selection logic that systematically differentiates between predefined groups of applicants without considering the specific qualities and competencies of the *individual* applicant. In a nutshell, pupils from lower school tiers must compete with a higher number of pupils from higher school tiers. This leads to a negative group stereotype about the low “employability” of school leavers from the lower tiers (see Solga 2005 for the description of this mechanism in Germany). Young persons with “ascribed” characteristics that act as negative market signals (for instance lower school tier, migrant background) have fewer prospects to find an apprenticeship. Characteristics like “employability” or “trainability” are thus not defined only through a straightforward relation between human-capital characteristics of individuals but through a variety of factors defining their relative position in the labor-queue. It is well documented that employers do not select on the basis of skill or competence, but that they use the visited school type as a signaling

device: The visited school type thus has an independent effect on the chance to enter apprenticeships of higher social status. As Meyer describes: “Even pupils of the tiers with “low demands” who fulfill the highest skill-demands (PISA-levels 4-5) only in one out of four cases (28%) have a chance to find an apprenticeship with extended demands. For young persons from secondary school with extended demands, this is the case for 3 out of 4 cases (72%)” (Meyer 2003: 28). Therefore, there exists a tendency to give apprenticeship positions to pupils from obligatory school pathways with “extended demands”, even if pupils from school tracks with lower demands have the same PISA competence-level.

As Meyer, Hupka/Brunner/Keller (2011) have shown based on TREE-data, one-quarter of the cohort of school leavers does not find a direct entry into vocational training after one year, thus having to drawback to “bridging offers”<sup>8</sup> (ibid.: 91). The results also show that a relatively constant percentage of NEETS (6-9%) persists until even three years after obligatory schooling. In 2006, 18% of the 2001 cohort who are not in education anymore have exited upper secondary education without having graduated (Meyer/Bertschy 2011: 97). These authors describe that “there is an alarmingly strong correlation between non-completion/drop-out and social background” (ibid: 97ff), with “students attending the basic requirements track drop(ing) out twice as often as students enrolled in the advanced tracks” (ibid.: 99). Albeit the Swiss labor market absorbs populations without upper secondary education, they are exposed to a higher risk of unemployment, precarious jobs, and bad working conditions. But even in the case of a successful apprenticeship diploma, the differential risk to enter an unqualified job after completion is higher for those from “intellectually less demanding” apprenticeships. As the Swiss educational report (2010) has shown, persons with certificates in “less intellectually demanding apprenticeships [...] are significantly more likely to find either no job after graduation or only an unqualified job that would not have needed the apprenticeship” (ibid. 2010: 150). The apprenticeship system, as the main distribution mechanism of social positions, thus has important effects on the labor-market entry patterns and positions, coming with higher risks for those who were not so lucky.

### 2.2.2. Mechanisms that Lead to Inequalities

While the supply in apprenticeships is dependent on economic development, the organization of the occupation-education link in Switzerland leads to the fact that employers act as important gate-keepers for accessing upper secondary education. Firms and professional organizations define both the content as well as the access

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8 The notion of “bridging offers” is used inter-alia with the notion of “transition measures”. See footnote 13 for a more detailed description of this central notion.

requirements to an apprenticeship, and as youngsters must run through an application process (like in a labor-market) similar selection mechanisms than on the “regular” labor-market apply. The allocation of apprenticeships happens through the “free hand” of the market. This situation leads to problems, especially for the lower educated young persons. Within labor economics, this is explained with Thurow’s “labor queue” theory (Thurow 1975). During the selection process, employers order types of potential applicants for a specific job. As employers have no direct knowledge of the individual applicant, they will have to rely on “on the basis of average characteristics of the group, or groups to which he or she belongs, rather than upon her own characteristics” (Thurow 1995: 175). This can lead to what Thurow calls “statistical discrimination”. As employers must choose the applicants for an apprenticeship based on incomplete information. It is inherently insecure if the applicant “fits”, that is why employers base their judgments on “market signals”. The easiest way to evaluate applicants leaving school is their school results – the lower the school results, the further behind the person is in the labor-market queue. In situations in which a negative demand-supply relation persists, young persons at the end of the labor queue have poor chances to find an apprenticeship. This is crucial to understand the context-dependency of such characteristics like “employability” or “trainability”: The latter are not defined through a straightforward relation between human-capital characteristics of individuals, but in the first instance through their relative position in the labor-queue. Brunner et al. show – based on a Swiss transition panel – that this leads to a situation in which a young person that has to draw back on a transition measure at a specific moment in time, could have made a linear transition when the apprenticeship-market situation would have been better (Seibert/Hupka-Brunner/Imdorf 2009). Research conducted within the research program “Integration and exclusion” (NFP 51) showed that these selection mechanisms played an important role for the transmission of inequalities (see for instance Imdorf 2010).

Another important signal is the school-tier, with those from the lower school tiers having more problems to access apprenticeships – especially in a situation where the number of applicants from higher school tiers entering the apprenticeship system is growing. Solga (2005) has shown for Germany that the educational expansion, with increasing educational preferences for the higher school tiers, has led to a “stratified crowding out” of the lower school tiers. In a nutshell, the number of pupils in the lower school tiers is decreasing during the last 10 years, and this reduced number of pupils from lower school tiers must compete with a higher number of pupils from higher school tiers. According to Solga, this may have led to a negative group stereotype about the low “employability” of school leavers from the lower tiers. While we cannot deduce that a similar effect exists for Switzerland, an independent effect of the school-tier is proven. Seibert et al. (2009) have also shown that the number of young persons in transition measures correlates with the num-

ber of pupils in the lower tiers of the Swiss school system per canton ( $r=0.56$ ). The school tier thus acts as an independent explanation for the transition probability. Furthermore, the same authors have shown that a pupil from the medium school tier has higher probabilities to enter the apprenticeship market than one from the lower school tiers, even with the same level of cognitive capacities (measured by PISA test-scores). The effects of the school type reduce the transition probabilities even 2 years after obligatory schooling – or after participating in a transition measure (ibid.). With increasing participation rates in the higher school tiers, pupils from lower school tiers are exposed to increased competition on the apprenticeship market, leading to growing rationing of apprenticeship places. This rationing does not progress to the same extent throughout the different sectors and segments of the labor-market but applies particularly to those apprenticeship-sectors which are popular amongst school leavers, and in which many applicants are confronted with a low number of apprenticeship places. The school-level thus also operates as an important selection device for different industrial sectors and labor-market segments. Imdorf (2004), classifying the different apprenticeship tracks according to different labor market segments (ranging from qualified “specialist” labor-markets to labor-market for skilled employees, on to unqualified labor-markets) shows that during their transition period, young persons’ job choices are revised downwards according to their school tier, their school level and their migration status (ibid.: 335). He also shows that according to these criteria, some have to revise their job choices towards the lower labor market segments, while others can maintain their initial plans. The scope of accessible professions is not formally regulated (as everybody is “allowed” to apply for any apprenticeship they want), but implicitly reduced through the situation on the labor market, especially for lower educated pupils. The low level of skills mismatch of dual vet-systems thus comes at the price of flexible downward adaptation of job choices by the lowest qualified.

In an empirical study, Stalder (2011) operationalizes the different levels of requirements for the different apprenticeship tracks based on a survey amongst vocational trainers and vocational guidance professionals. She analyses what school-level pupils need to have to be successfully selected for a certain apprenticeship. Here, the level of requirements was defined as the cognitive abilities required for an apprenticeship. Stalder defines 6 levels of requirements and asks vocational guidance professionals to match the different apprenticeship pathways and the required cognitive skills according to the different levels of requirements. Stalder shows that (in the opinion of vocational guidance professionals) the fact of being on the lowest requirement levels (the lowest tier of the three-tiered school level) leaves 52 of the 92 existing apprenticeship-pathways open. Participation in a school-based transition measure would, according to Stalder allow to increase the scope of choice considerably. Stalder also shows, based on data from the TREE Panel, that the estimated requirements level for an apprenticeship (by the vocational counselors) corresponds

to the actual apprenticeship pathways the youngsters are in (Stalder 2011: 12). The same figures also show that the school tier a pupil visits (and is guided to at the age of 12 years) strongly predefines his vocational pathway and later job. Furthermore, as the Swiss educational report has shown, graduates of “less intellectually demanding apprenticeships [...] are significantly more likely to find either no job after graduation or only an unqualified job that would not have needed the apprenticeship” (Swiss educational report, 2010: 150). The benefits of completing an apprenticeship, such as (sector-specific) transferable skills and secure employment prospects due to skills that match the labor-market requirements are thus not the same for all. The organization of the transition period, mediated through the selection mechanisms of employers must be seen as an important transmission belt for social inequalities.

The selection mechanisms at the transition to apprenticeship also explain why even in rather favorable labor-market conditions, some applicants may be left without an apprenticeship: Solga and Kohlrausch (2012) suggest that the stereotype of “low-educated” or “pupil from the lower school-tier” could have taken such a discriminatory character that it functions as an absolute exclusion criterion. In a certain sense, applicants from lower school tiers may “drop-out” of the labor queue once and for all, at least for certain labor-market segments. This corresponds to anecdotal information from interviews according to which some more demanding apprenticeships are only accessible when coming from the highest school tier. This would also relativize the argument that demographic change and the increasing demand of a skilled labor-force may solve the problem of an insufficient number of apprenticeship-places without further need for political interference or regulation. We might imagine a situation in which skill shortage in some sectors persists, while on the other side some school leavers might not find an apprenticeship, because they do not enter the labor queue of these sectors, and because their characteristics may lead them to be excluded from the selection process in sectors that are hiring.

The bottleneck for the transition from school to work is located at the transition from compulsory schooling to the apprenticeship system. Accordingly, the main dividing line on the Swiss labor-market is between those with vocational training and those without. The strong institutionalization of the school to work transition comes with certain negative impacts in terms of patterns of inequalities: Firstly, the standardized allocation of professional positions, geared not only by the three-tier school system but also through the selection mechanisms operating at the gates into secondary education, strongly constrains the choice of a profession particularly for lower educated school leavers. The clear definition of skill-patterns according to professions, sanctioned by certifications accredited in a corporatist mode between the state and the market actors, links the access to certain economic sectors to the fulfillment of a specific training. Those without

vocational training have little to no chance to access the well-remunerated and relatively protected industries and sectors for which an apprenticeship is required. Furthermore, the allocation mechanism at the first transition leads to disparities in the interior of the apprenticeship-system according to different apprenticeship-segments (Imdorf 2004). The transition system can thus be seen as a “transmission belt” for inequalities.

### **2.3. The Politics of VET in Switzerland and the Emergence of Transition Measures**

The following chapter will assess more profoundly the chronological development of the Swiss transition regime. Particularly, it will assess how Switzerland has reacted to an increasingly difficult situation on the apprenticeship market at the beginning of the 1990s and describe the reform process of the transition regime until the post-2010-era. In doing so, I will not restrict myself to reforms of the VET system, but also show how reforms in the unemployment insurance, political attempts to institutionalize a right to vocational training, the introduction of new, alternative transition measures and the reform of the VET-act, which have led to a discursive re-framing of the issue of youth unemployment. The chapter is structured chronologically. While the first part will describe the apprenticeship crisis in the 1990s, the second part describes the institutionalization of the Motivational Semesters (1995). The third part will then describe the political struggles on the inclusivity of the Swiss VET system that emerged during a popular initiative demanding a “right to vocational training” (1999) and its impact on the Reform of the VET-act in 2002. The following part focuses on the new politics of transition management based on the project “Nahtstelle” (2006-2010) and the Introduction of the Benchmark of 95% of school leavers with upper secondary education. The last part assesses these changes from a more general angle and describes the changes in the political regulation of youth transitions.

#### **2.3.1. The Apprenticeship-Crisis and the Rise of Youth Unemployment in the Early Nineties**

As described in the previous chapter, one of the key features of market-based apprenticeship systems is that the demand for apprentices is linked to the overall labor-market development. This has the positive effect of reducing skill-mismatch, as the economy regulates its needs in qualified labor through offering only those apprenticeship places that it needs later on. Nevertheless, in times of economic downturn, this might lead to a situation in which young persons are left without access to secondary education. Switzerland experienced such a situation from



the 1990s onwards. When in the 1990s, Switzerland started tumbling through its longest post-war-recession, the manufacturing sector, which was considerably involved in the provision of apprenticeships, retracted. On the other side, the service-oriented industry and more knowledge-intensive business services started to grow (Gonon/Maurer 2012; Trampusch 2011), leading to a demand in employees with a higher educational level. Between 1991 and 1993, the number of unemployed youth (aged 15-24) raised from 16700 (3%) to 33700 (6.9%)<sup>9</sup>. The level of unemployed youth went down until 2003 (8.3%) with a new peak in 2009 with 38500 (7.9%) unemployed. Gonon and Maurer (2012) describe that this increase in youth unemployment is the effect of a reduction of apprenticeship places, as the general economic contraction led to a decline in firms involved in the training of apprentices: “whereas more than 24 percent of all firms were engaged in training apprentices in 1985, this figure had dropped to 17.8 percent by 2000. At 16 percent, the respective share in the service sector was even lower” (Hotz-Hart 2008: 102). These changes resulted in a high percentage of students who, after obligatory schooling, could not enter an apprenticeship. Again, this had a particularly negative effect on the school leavers from the lower secondary school tiers – on the one side they were facing a constraining demand on the apprenticeship sector especially in those apprenticeships requiring lower skills, on the other side they were not allowed to enter the upper tiers of school-based upper secondary education – only accessible for pupils from higher school tiers. Gaillard (2009) gives an overview of the development of the population flow from obligatory schooling to secondary education from the 1980s to nowadays and shows that a considerable gap between demand and supply of apprenticeships developed during that period. While until the 1990s the number of obligatory school leavers and the supply in apprenticeships contracted parallelly, from the 1990s on, the cohort of obligatory school leavers became larger, and despite the parallel rise of school-based secondary education, the number of apprenticeship places started to stagnate. This situation endures until the late 2000s – despite considerable political measures to raise the number of apprenticeship places, the absolute number of apprenticeship places only regains the same level than in the 1990s in 2005. With a rising rate of obligatory school leavers and due to an increasing number of pupils choosing upper secondary education that leads to university access, the demand-supply gap could hardly be compensated.

As a direct response to this crisis, the parliament decided on direct intervention measures in April 1997, the “Lehrstellenbeschluss” (LSB 1 and 2). The LSB1 and LSB 2, voted unanimously in 1997 and 1999 respectively, had three main pillars, the first aiming at augmenting the incentives for employers to provide apprenticeships, the second pillar aimed at developing “low threshold measures” for young

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9 All data from Swiss labor force survey, accessed via the Swiss statistical office (detailed results according to unemployment statistics according to the ILO definition).

persons without an apprenticeship, and the third aimed at developing apprenticeship places in sectors with high future potential, for instance high-tech and services. Until the year 2000, 60 million (LSB1) and 100 million Swiss francs (LSBII) were to be invested in these different pillars. Simultaneously, discussions about the necessity to reform the VET law from 1978 emerged. A report commissioned by the parliament published in 1996<sup>10</sup> identified the need to adapt vocational training legislation still characterized by traditional craft professions to the emergence of new service professions, an increasingly globalized economy, and the need for a more flexible workforce. This report launched the revision of the VET act finally voted in 2002. The LSB II was meant to bridge the time to the implementation of the new VET act in which more stable solutions to the apprenticeship crisis should be discussed. During this time – and with the help of the LSB 1 and LSB 2 – “bridging offers”, were implemented and financed in the cantons. These ranged from pre-vocational years at the cantonal professional schools preparing to specific vocational fields, on to cantonal financed additional school years up to more practically oriented offers with work-elements (Gertsch et. al. 2000). These so-called bridging offers did not lead to any specific certified qualifications but were designed as a form of “waiting room” for the world of work. Gaillard (2009) and Hupka Brunner (2011) also point to the fact that the number of bridging offers rose strongly in the 1990s and remained relatively high even after the betterment of the apprenticeship crisis. As Sacchi and Meyer describe, the buffer function of transition measures can be shown on a macro-systemic level and can be reliably predicted based on models (Sacchi/Meyer 2012: 12). Particularly the LSB 2 put a focus on the development of “low threshold measures” (BBT 2004) aimed at youth at risk. The newly founded BBT/OFFT<sup>11</sup> was commissioned to supervise the different projects and organized the distribution of funds to the cantons, and over 100 decentralized initiatives and measures in local areas were funded. Even though the financial resources proposed by the BBT have not been fully exploited due to restrictive allocation of funds by the BBT/OFFT (Häfeli 2004) this was an important milestone in the development of the Swiss transition regime. Häfeli’s evaluation report highlighted the better “coordination” of different transition measures, the development of “case-management”

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10 “Bericht über die Berufsbildung (Bundesgesetz über die Berufsbildung) vom 11. September 1996” (NR 96.075). In this Document, References to parliamentary Motions and Initiatives are made by their unique identifier number (in the case of the LIPA Initiative: 00.086) that makes them traceable on the Website of the Swiss administration. References to Discussions in the Swiss National Council (Nationalrat) are made through the acronym NR (for national council), the Year and the page in the Official Bulletin (“Amtliches Bulletin”) of the national council.

11 “Bundesamt für Berufsbildung und Technologie” (Federal Office for Professional Training and Technology)

and inter-institutional coordination schemes, and called for the future development of “integrated transition policies” (Häfeli 2004) and “tightly knit safety nets” (OECD 2000, cited in Häfeli 2004: 5), a wording that found entry into subsequent policy papers. The LSB 1 and 2 thus have fueled important policy experiences on the basis of which the further development of transition policies in Switzerland were based on.

### 2.3.2. Reforms in the Unemployment Insurance for Young People

The phase between obligatory schooling and Work/VET could be termed, until the late 1990s an “institutional no-man’s land” (Boltzman/Eckmann-Saillant/De Rham 1994) – no specific measures existed until the 1990s for the period between obligatory schooling and the majority age, leaving the youth phase either at the sphere of the market (through apprenticeships) or – for the at that time very low youth unemployment, to the subsistence of the family. This changed when Switzerland started tumbling through its longest post-war-recession. In this process, it became clear to what extent the demand for apprenticeships was linked to the overall labor-market development, leaving many youngsters at the end of obligatory schooling without an apprenticeship. The number of VET places decreased dramatically, the transitional space between obligatory schooling and work became increasingly institutionalized. The initial development of institutional support systems goes back to unemployment insurance. Unemployment insurance firstly provided a right to young persons after obligatory schooling to gain a minimal replacement of the wage they would have gained in an apprenticeship in the year 1982. During the apprenticeship crisis of the nineties, the piloting (1994) and the introduction (1996) of specific active labor-market measures for young persons without an apprenticeship started. The large-scale introduction of “Motivational Semesters” was part of the so called “supporting measures” that were decided on directly in the wake of the apprenticeship crisis. The public pressure on the federal state for action led to a massive expansion of Motivational Semesters from initially one in the canton of Valais on to 60 in Switzerland in the early 2000’s (Froidevaux/Weber 2003; Heiniemann 2006). Motivational Semesters are mainly implemented by non-profit organizations – subcontracted by the cantonal unemployment offices – and function under the legal makeup of temporary employment programs as described in federal unemployment law. They do not, however, provide any certified qualifications, but aim at enhancing the “employability” of young persons. Motivational Semesters are a measure for young job-seekers without upper secondary education – constituting in the 2009 Budget of the unemployment insurance the highest amount of expenditures in the field of U25 (Seco 2010). Emerging from a local initiative in the canton of Wallis as a direct response to the increasing youth unemployment in the early ’90s, specially conceived for young people who did not find an appren-

ticeship after compulsory schooling. They are mostly provided by public or private providers, maintaining performance agreements with the cantonal public employment service. In a nutshell, Motivation Semesters are particularly designed for persons who are unemployed after completing their compulsory schooling or whose apprenticeship was interrupted, offers them assistance over a period of 6 months to help them choose the best training path. Participants benefit from personal coaches who help them set up individual action plans and follow their progress through repeated counseling and mentoring sessions (see Chabanet/Guigni 2013: 313). They are provided with intensive weekly vocational counseling in the framework of the program in order to develop a “professional project”. The introduction of motivation semesters, a measure specifically put in place for young persons without upper secondary education, has to be analyzed in its economic and social context. The unemployment insurance was the first public body reacting to the apprenticeship crisis. This does not come as a surprise: as the unemployment insurance is one of the few policy domains under federal authority, it was one of the only levers with which the confederation could respond to the fact of the contraction on the apprenticeship market. The diachronic development of transition measures shows that measures for young school leavers funded by unemployment insurance largely preceded the implementation of measures funded and implemented by the cantons. It is highly probable that this is due to Swiss federalism – UI was the only lever through which the confederation – under a strong political pressure to react to the containment of the apprenticeship market – could finance measures in the cantons. This development tackles an educational problem (the insufficient offer of apprenticeship places) through labor market policies, which must make up for the failure of the Confederation to effectively impact on the demand side of apprenticeships.

The early 1990s recession did not only lead to specific reforms in the VET sector but had a large impact on social protection systems. As a reaction to rising expenditures of unemployment insurance, the legislators started a reform process which reinforced activation measures in Swiss unemployment insurance, particularly for young persons. While in previous crises, Switzerland could buffer the decreasing demand for labor through regulating the inflow of foreign workers, it was not possible anymore due to a change in immigration policy during the 1980s (Bonoli/Mach 2000). This led to rising unemployment rates and to budgetary deficits in unemployment insurance. As described, the recession in the early nineties led to a reduction in apprenticeship places. Within the literature, this period is often described as “rupture” (Champion 2011) in the Swiss labor-market, during which the Swiss unemployment insurance witnessed the change towards an activation regime. The subsequent revisions of unemployment insurance in 1990; 1995 and 2002 not only introduced cost-containment measures (by altering the eligibility and entitlement rules, for instance, the extension of “waiting periods” for young persons and the

strengthening of previous work requirements). In addition, stricter eligibility criteria, stricter access requirements (being “ready and able to work”), and certain behavioral preconditions (for instance showing sufficient job search efforts) were introduced (see e.g. Ehrler/Sager 2011). They also considerably altered the status of young persons just having finished their training in unemployment insurance: The 1995 reforms introduced a waiting period of 120 days for young people without completed training, implemented a new definition of “suitable work” – and while young persons without upper secondary training were freed from a prior contribution period (thus, the fact of having paid contributions to UI), the only possibility for school leavers looking for an apprenticeship to benefit from UI-payments was the participation in a Motivational Semester<sup>12</sup>.

These reforms not only altered the eligibility criteria and duration of unemployment benefits for young persons (see e.g. Chabanet/Guigni 2013). They also introduced important structural and administrative changes. The 1995 reform brought the introduction of regional employment offices, who were meant to monitor the job search activities of unemployed persons, as well as the introduction of new active labor market measures. While the possibility to provide active measures within unemployment insurance legally existed since the first unemployment law in 1982, little recourse was made to such measures. It is only within the heyday of the 1995 reforms that an increasing use was made of active labor-market measures. The introduction and recourse of activation measures were paralleled by three other administrative reforms. An administrative reform introduced the creation of regional employment services (these functions were previously conducted by municipalities) (Ehrler/Sager 2011). The control of job-search efforts was meant to be monitored by monthly meetings between a case manager and the beneficiary. At the same time, the 1995 act introduced the creation of a cantonal logistic office for ALMP's. The cantons were now responsible for the implementation and governance of active labor market measures, and were required to provide a prescribed number of ALMP's in return for receiving a fixed amount per person from the federal unemployment insurance fund. In 2010, the federal office for finance decreed a new maximum allocation per beneficiary with a degressive federal contribution depending on the unemployment rate of each canton (while for the first 1, 2 %, cantons received 3500 CHF, the cantons receive 2800 for each share of unemployed from 1,2 – 4 %, etc.)

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12 The most important change, of the 1995 reform, however seems to be the abolishment of the possibility to requalify for unemployment insurance benefits through participating in an activation measure (Champion 2011: 128) a measure that potentially would lead to an increase of persons that – once exhausted their entitlement period of UI-benefits, would find themselves in social assistance. As Social assistance is financed by cantonal and communal authorities, this would constitute a significant financial burden for local level actors.

(Ehrler/Sager 2011). This new regulation penalized cantons with higher unemployment rates and devolved the costs of unemployment to the cantons. According to Tony Erb, this has led to a changing pattern in the use of activation measures by the cantons: it “constrains the cantons to better plan the use of ALMP’s, to fix priorities and to better assess their needs in terms of ALMP’s while being constrained not to surpass the annual financial limit” (Erb 2010: 41, own translation). This system “incites the cantons to only choose the most efficient measures” (Erb 2010: 40). As they are free in the way to allocate funding, this would enhance the governance capacities for the cantons.

While the Swiss unemployment insurance is one of the few policy domains governed by federal law, the implementation of active policies was increasingly decentralized and brought to the cantonal level. The introduction of the logistic offices for active measures as well as the regional employment offices effectively changed the governance structure of the Swiss unemployment insurance in a more active way. These new modes of governance installed new relations both between the confederation and the cantonal level (ORP and LMMT), as well as between the cantonal offices and the providers of the active-labor market measures (see e.g. Engler 2005). At the level of the relation between the Swiss federal authorities and cantonal administrations, an agreement was concluded according to which the performance of regional employment offices was to be evaluated with respect to four criteria (mean duration of unemployment spells, number of people entering long-term unemployment, number of unemployed losing their entitlement to UI benefits). A performance-based benchmarking of the different regional employment services was put in place, according to which financial rewards and penalties can be awarded. On the level of active labor market measures, usually implemented by non-governmental organizations and associations, the implementation of the logistic offices for labor-market measures lead to a purchaser-split between the program providers and the cantonal administrators and installing marketized governance relations. The logistic offices “determine, in consultation with the RES’s requirements relating to activation programs, plan them award contracts to service providers and evaluate performances. In this way, a quasi-market was created in which the logistics offices of the ALMP as public bodies representing the unemployed, purchase the activation programs. The suppliers are public and private organizations with the majority being in competition with one another, but which, depending on the nature of the program, are not allowed to make any profit” (Ehrler/Sager 2011: 161). This amounts to the introduction of “market-principles” in the provision of active-labor-market measures. It is important to say that while in some cantons, the introduction of these new governance modes led to public tendering for a part or all of the measures (Erb 2010), the financing of Motivational Semesters in the canton of Vaud happens through a “hybrid model”, which merges a logic of “subventions” with a logic of public tendering.

### 2.3.3. The new VET-Act and the Popular Initiative on the Right to Vocational Training

In the second half of the '90s, the situation on the apprenticeship market had only marginally improved. The apprenticeship market was still characterized by imbalances between supply and demand. During the period in which the urgency measures had been implemented in 1997 and 1999 and in which first deliberations on the new law on vocational training and education started, a popular initiative by youth organizations and trade unions “For a sufficient offer in vocational education and training” – the “LIPA-initiative” (submitted in October 1999) was submitted to the parliament as a reaction to the contracted situation on the apprenticeship market. The initiative demanded the introduction of an article in the federal constitution that guaranteed a sufficient offer of apprenticeship places. This would have been amounted to granting a “right” to vocational training to every young person. The initiative demanded that the confederation and the cantons provide high-quality apprenticeships, either in firms or, if necessary in state-led schools for all school leavers. This was to be financed through a “VET-fund” fed by a VET-fee paid by employers. This initiative partly overlapped with the negotiations on the reforms of the VET-law. While the initiative for a law on a “right to VET” was discussed on 12.12.2001, the first parliamentary discussions and favorable votes on the reform of the VET-Act in the first chamber had just started one week before (on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2001). It seems as if the new law on VET is a concrete response to the claims of the popular initiative. In March 2002, the National Council (NR 2001: 397) postponed the date on which the Swiss population had to pronounce itself for or against the right to vocational education, hoping that eventually the supporters of the popular vote would withdraw their initiative once the new VET-Act was in force. Nevertheless, this was not the case and the popular initiative was rejected by the Swiss people with only 30% of positive votes. Nevertheless, some of the claims of the initiative for a right to vocational training found entry into the new VET-law, albeit in a much “softer” version.

Even though the initiative has been rejected, it is of utmost analytical value for several reasons. First, it allows analyzing how the status of a young person's social citizenship (Chevalier 2015) is negotiated in the political sphere. After all, the initiative's claim is to de-commodify education and to replace the market mode of coordination by a state-governed mode of coordination – a process that would without any doubt have been a watershed in Swiss VET politics as it would have replaced an individual and familial responsibility to care for one's own upper secondary education by a responsibility of the state. This would have amounted to a rise of the age of obligatory schooling and the introduction of school-based alternatives to apprenticeship training that provides recognized certificates in professions recognized by trade and craft organizations. This would effectively have given

Switzerland a more “universalist” touch similar to other countries (for instance Denmark and Austria) which dispose of schemes that aim to provide apprenticeship places for those that did not find an apprenticeship (Nikolai/Ebner 2010; Ebner 2013). Secondly, regarding the political economy of skill formation, this exemplifies a centrally politically contested field in coordinated skill formation regimes: the question of “who controls, who pays, who provides, VET” (Brusemeyer/Trampusch 2011: 415) and the “relationship of training to general education” (ibid.). Faced with a reduced integration capacity of the apprenticeship sector, the Swiss vocational training system, at that time weakly regulated by the federal state and mainly left to the sectoral and industry-specific representations, was confronted with reform demands. These involved the firms, trade unions and progressive, liberal and conservative political actors in deliberation on the degree of state intervention into an until then fully corporatist mode of governance. On the one side, trade union representatives, and to a certain extent, cantonal actors (the cantons of Geneva and Neuchâtel had already implemented a VET-tax) were able to exert considerable pressure: As the apprenticeship system could not provide secondary education for everyone, installing state-provided upper secondary education financed by the federal state or the cantons seemed inevitable. Employer organizations were opposed to this development, as it would result in a loss of control and monitoring of skill formation and considerably limit firm autonomy in defining the contents and access to vocational training. Trade union representatives stressed the need to introduce state-funded apprenticeships leading to the same vocational qualification sanctioned by certified diplomas of the federal apprenticeship diploma. In the Year 1999 the LIPA initiative was submitted for popular vote, supported by trade unions and by youth organizations in which the “right to vocational education” would be introduced in the federal constitution. In its message on the initiative for a right to vocational education, the federal council gives the voting recommendation of rejecting the initiative (BBT 2000). Albeit consenting to the idea that every young person should have access to vocational training, the federal council pronounces itself unfavorable to the means expressed in the initiative (ibid.: 98). Concerns are expressed regarding possible negative effects in terms of economic competitiveness, and it is argued that the initiative would threaten the character of vocational training as a corporatist shared duty by the state and the employers. In order to maintain the corporatist arrangement, the government pointed towards the reform of the vocational training law in which allegedly, this problem could find a better solution (see also Federal Department for Economy 2001). The press documentation issued by the federal department of economy stressed the fact that the initiative would lead to a “socialization” of vocational education. Furthermore, the federal office for finance provided a long list of arguments against the reform, pointing to possible unintended side-effects: the financing of VET through the state would provide a negative incentive for “free-riding” employers who would just buy them-



selves out of their responsibility to provide apprenticeship places (joint statement by the OPET and the federal department for the Economy 2003). Most federal actors were opposing the initiative as this would allegedly lead to dismantling of the dual apprenticeship system. Furthermore, it was argued that the increased financial involvement of the federal state could incite cantons to reduce their efforts in the field of VET, (see e.g. Rohrer/Trampusch 2011: 153). In the discussions of the first chamber on the 12.12.2001, members of the liberal and conservative parties and the progressive parties were fiercely opposed. The former were worried about a "nationalization of the educational system" (NR<sup>13</sup>, 2001: 1855), feared an "etatistic, centralistic solution" (ibid.: 1856), that leads to a retreat of firms from training (ibid.: 1856) and to training young persons against market needs (ibid.: 1857). Doubts were expressed on the de-responsibilisation of firms to ensure the training of new staff, but also of the young person's themselves, who would too much "rely on the state, and this will undermine their motivation" (NR 2001: 1859). Such a right to education would "offer a too soft cushion" (NR 2001: 1861) to young persons. Proponents of the initiative pointed to the detrimental situation in which particularly those pupils from lower educational school level wherein, having their range of possible VET-places reduced to few professions (ibid.: 1860) and facing a high competition pressure on the VET-market, the unfair selection by many employers and the need to accommodate that 10 % of youngsters that end up without upper secondary education. As the upper secondary education level has become a minimum condition for a continuous working career, a right had to be granted just alike the right to basic education (see NR 2001: 1862).

Even though the initiative has been rejected, it had considerable consequences for the later implementation of the federal vocational training law, whose reform has been initiated in 2002 and which has been implemented in 2004. The voting of the LIPA initiative coincided temporally with the parliamentary discussions on the new vocational training law. In its voting recommendations, the parliament and the federal council posited the new vocational training act would constitute – despite (or exactly because) its much weaker instruments – a more appropriate response to the apprenticeship crisis than the LIPA – initiative. As such, the new VET-act was seen, particularly by economic actors as an "indirect counter-argument" (Raths 2003). The parliamentary discussions – both on the initiative and the VET-Law evolved around the question of how much state interference with the dual apprenticeship system should be allowed. But central elements of the initiative re-appeared when it came to the discussion of specific articles of the VET-act. As Johannes Randegger, a member of the national council from the liberal party, describes during the initial discussion of the VET-law, "the concerns [...] of the initiative have been discussed seriously and we tried to include as many principles of

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13 All quotes from parliamentary debates are translated by the Author.

the initiative as possible within the new vocational training act” (Randegger, NR 2001: 1852). When it came to the discussion on the detailed formulation on the article 1 of the VET act, a proposal of the minority demanded that the formulation according to which the federation, the cantons and the organizations of the world of work “*strive* a sufficient supply of apprenticeship places” was even to be replaced by a more binding formulation (“*ensures* a sufficient supply”) (NR 2001: 1574). This was done with the idea in mind that “if this option is taken, and the parliament gives the federal level competence to become active, and the initiators of the LIPA-initiative might drawback their demands” (ibid.: 1574). In the end, the parliament opted for the less binding formulation, stating that “cantons, the federal state, and employers *strive* towards a sufficient supply [emphasis added]” in apprenticeship places. Furthermore, Article 11 of the new VET act postulates that the cantons have to “provide free of charge measures for persons with individual educational deficits [...] that prepare them for initial vocational training” (§11a VET-act) and that “in cases of imbalances on the apprenticeship market, the federation *can* introduce limited measures to tackle them” (§11b, proposition of the majority, Nr. 2001: 1580). Different to the formulation postulated in the popular initiative, the federal level had a “possibility” rather than a “duty” to intervene. As stricter formulation was rejected with 95:59 votes. Another point in which elements of the reform have been introduced in the VET act – again in a weakened, less binding form, was the introduction of “apprenticeship-funds”. The LIPA initiative proposed to implement a federal fund financed by those companies that do not train apprentices – this fund would serve to implement training places and full-time school-based vocational training. Furthermore, the new VET-law introduced the possibility to create sectoral binding training funds (§ 60). In cases in which 30% of the firms within a sector, representing 30% of the workforce of this sector are part of such a fund, firms that do not provide apprenticeships must pay contributions. While this mechanism can prevent “free-riding” by some employers of one sector, (e.g. employers profiting from the fact that other employers are training apprentices) it is not able to effectively regulate the overall demand-supply relationship, as would have been done by the system of the LIPA-initiative. Nevertheless, trade-unions and youth organizations interpreted the vocational act as an outcome of their lobbying and a success – “the new law for vocational training has partly taken up proposals of the LIPA initiative” (Siegerist 2002: 11, own translation). The new vocational training act did neither secure the right to a first secondary education nor did it install the legal possibility to implement state-funded vocational training through an apprenticeship fund at the federal level. Nevertheless, the new VET-law implemented the possibility – in case of “imbalances on the apprenticeship-market” – for the federal council to intervene and to take measures (art 13). Furthermore, the reform of the VET law led to the creation of sectoral training funds. These sectoral funds were driven forward mainly by a coalition between trade unions and

the “Gewerbe” (SGB 2007: 1). Large firms represented by the Swiss Employers’ Associations (SAV) and the liberal party opposed these sectoral funds without success (SGB 2007: 1; Strahm 2008: 332). This can be seen in the consultation process: while the “Gewerbe” (the trade representations) argued in favor for the training funds because it would prevent the “free-riding” of some employers, they strongly opposed a “federal solution” (initially proposed by the LIPA initiative) and argued in favor of cantonal and sectoral funds. Also, the cantons of Western Switzerland which had already implemented cantonal funds opposed federal and sectoral funds because they would incite employers to leave the cantonal funds for the higher-level ones. But these sectoral training funds differ considerably from the solution proposed by the initial LIPA initiative. While the latter would have led to a decoupling of the demand side of apprenticeships from the supply side through externally funding full-time school equivalents to the traditional dual-system apprenticeship provision, the sectoral training funds implemented with the new vocational training legislation do not provide such a basis as they are based on a voluntary principle.

We see that during the reforms of the Swiss VET-system, the market model of coordination that was leading to an undersupply of education has not been supplemented by a more interventionist reform of the VET-sector. Even though at the time the new law was decided on, 10% of youngsters aged 25 did not have an upper secondary education, the legislators restrained from intervening in the demand-supply relationship. In April 2004, the year in which the VET-act became applicable law, 21.500 open apprenticeship places faced 23.000 potential applicants. VET specialists claim that in order to allow a real choice, the supply would have to exceed the demand by 10-20% (Zihlman 2004). In contrast, in Germany, the APFIG (see footnote 17) from 1976, supported by a judgment of the constitutional court of 10.12.1980 developed the notion of a “sufficient offer” of apprenticeship places, thus a rate between demand and supply that serves as a yardstick for the right of the state to intervene in the demand-supply relationship. Here, the yardstick for “sufficient” apprenticeship places was fixed at the yardstick of a surplus of 12.5 % to the demand (see Busemeyer 2009: 115).

The parliamentary discussions showed that the issue of the relation between firm-based and school-based vocational education and training proves to be one of the “neuralgic points of contention and variation” (Busemeyer/Trampusch 2012: 21) in collective skill regimes. As has been described, employers’ organizations were able to influence the reform of vocational education towards an “self-preserving pattern of change” (Trampusch 2011) in which the “reform has continued the inherited path of the Swiss apprenticeship system to a great extent and reinforced the practices that sustain the collectivist training system as an institution” (Rohrer/Trampusch 2011: 154). This is also reflected by the resistance against the interference of the state in the corporatist organization of the apprenticeship sector. The “political struggles over the relationship between the autonomy of

firms and the extensiveness of “outside interference” (Busemeyer/Trampusch 2012: 162), for instance the relationship between firm autonomy and (semi-)public monitoring (who controls skill formation?) is the central “crux” for the debates about the inclusivity of the apprenticeship system.

As the situation on the apprenticeship-market did not ameliorate, after the introduction of the new VET-act in 2004, the parliament was confronted with several parliamentary interventions and different interpellations on the issue of the apprenticeship market. In June 2005, federal statistics about the apprenticeship market showed that 27.000 young people were still looking for an apprenticeship, and the gap between demand and supply amounted to 2000 apprenticeship places. In its 14<sup>th</sup> session, the national council proceeded to discuss five different postulates and parliamentary motions that proposed different measures to tackle youth unemployment. For instance, the Member of the Parliament Chantal Gallandé proposed to introduce a state-financed first apprenticeship year (Motion 05.391, NR 2005: 898). Based on the observation that the high number of young persons in transition measures generated costs of 300 million Swiss francs per year and that many of young persons are in transition measures simply because of the lack of apprenticeship places, not because of individual deficits (ibid.: 899), she proposed the introduction of pilot-projects aiming at institutionalizing the certification of a first apprenticeship year outside of firms (ibid.: 899). A similar measure exists in Germany and is called “Einstiegsqualifizierung” (EQJ). This proposition was judged incompatible with the “marketised” Swiss VET-system which was seen as the only way to ensure a match between skills and the labor force demand of firms. The liberal party opposed the introduction of these measures as “it is neither possible nor appropriate to provide a “artificial supplement” for lacking apprenticeship places by the federal state through the means of “social measures” or projects for unemployed – the federal state is too far away from the regional labor-markets to react appropriately” Parliamentary Pfister (NR 2005: 938) The liberal party interpreted the claim for a stronger involvement of the federal state as a “threat”, to the corporatist arrangement as a “one-sided cancellation of the cooperation and coordination of the three partners” (intervention of member of the parliament Hutter; NR 2005: 840) involved in the provision of VET, and argued that the measure proposed would only delay the problem of young person’s not entering the labor market by a year. Even though pilot projects in some sectoral fields existed, the parliament, and amongst them, the former president of the federal office (OPET) responsible for VET suggested the rejection of the proposition. All in all, five propositions (ranging from initial apprenticeship years to better coordination of the actors involved in the transition from school to work had been rejected.

Political attempts aiming to install a right to vocational training which would – in fine – have led to the installation of federally funded educational pathways have thus been demised at the benefit of maintaining the authority of the firm.

Also, other attempts in the wake of the new vocational training law, which aimed at giving the federation responsibilities for ensuring that enough apprenticeship places were offered have been dismissed due to lacking political majorities in the parliament. The federal legislation was left with weak leverages of action, initiatives aiming at the provision of apprenticeship places were left to the cantons and inter-cantonal policy sector organizations, (so called concordats) through which cantons coordinate their policies. Swiss federalism, with the responsibilities for educational legislation being in the hand of the cantons, furthermore constituted a barrier for the federal level to act in some of these fields. But also, within this process, the same conflict lines remained salient. Faced with structural economic problems and a demand-supply gap on the apprenticeship-market in the nineties, it seemed inevitable to intervene in the provision of apprenticeship places, for instance through the installation of full-time school-based alternatives. The claims of the Swiss unions and youth organizations pointed exactly in that direction – the LIPA initiative, wanting to hold accountable those employers that do not provide apprenticeships and giving more responsibilities to the federal level for the financing of VET, but also the calls of actors from the social sector, pointing to the strong implications access to secondary education had for later dependency of welfare benefits, bear witness of this process. Even though no effective mechanisms for intervening in the supply-demand -relation have been installed, and the primacy of the firm-based apprenticeship has rather been reinforced than questioned, some of the claims have led to stronger “universalization” of a right to education. Siegrist (2001) speaks of a “paradigm change” which has been triggered throughout the reform process, and which “indirectly leads to a right to education on secondary education level” (Siegrist 2001). And in fact, the new vocational training law implemented in 2004 states – in its first article that the “federal state, cantons and organizations of the world of work [...] strive towards a sufficient offer in the field of vocational training”. Nevertheless, differently than requested by the LIPA initiative which foresaw a federal fund for vocational training through which firm external full-time education could be installed, the federal level only gets attributed a secondary role, insofar it measures “aim at supporting financially, as far as possible the initiatives of the cantons and the organizations if the world of work” (§ 1, 2 bis. VPETA). Furthermore, Article 12 states that the “cantons can take measures to prepare a person with individual educational deficits at the end of obligatory schooling to prepare them to vocational training” reports the responsibility for compensatory measures to the cantons. This formulation perfectly takes up the distribution of responsibilities within swiss federalism. On the other hand, the formulation “young persons with educational deficits” operates as an individualized problem description, attributing the difficulties to access an apprenticeship to educational deficits rather than structural gaps. Finally, Article 13 allows the federal state to intervene in those cases an “imbalance” on the appren-

ticeship-market appears". Again, a relatively non-binding formulation, that nevertheless institutionalizes the possibility for state-intervention in the market mode of coordination of the apprenticeship-system. Compared to Germany, where such a possibility is institutionally given since the implementation of the APFG ("Ausbildungsplatzförderungsgesetz") in 1976, Switzerland is "a latecomer, catching up" (Champion 2011) due to multiple veto points and Swiss federalist structure that lead to delayed trends towards the possibility of state-intervention in the field of vocational education and training.

#### **2.4. Excursus: Collectivist Skill Formation Systems and the Right to Education**

Within the consultations on the policy process described above, the struggles around the competencies and responsibilities of the different actors can be observed. The negotiations took place during the period between 1998-2002 and can be read as a direct reaction to the "apprenticeship crisis" in the early 1990s. Faced with an increasing gap between supply and demand for apprenticeships, it seemed nearly unavoidable to enlarge the share of full-time school-based vocational training opportunities as an alternative to the traditional apprenticeship system. During the negotiations, it becomes clear that the primacy of a firm-based and controlled apprenticeship system was not questioned. As described above, several attempts to introduce a stronger involvement of actors of the federal state to intervene in the provision of secondary education, and to take a more direct impact on the provision of apprenticeship places was seen as an "attack" on the corporatist arrangement of the Swiss VET system – which was seen as having some minor coordination problems but considered to be working well. The majorities in the Swiss parliament and a coalition between liberal market-friendly parties and the economy led to the rejection of more state interference within the market-led coordination between demand and supply. The provision of publicly financed VET was an unwelcome intervention in a coordination model that provided exactly the skills the economy needed. According to these actors, the provision of publicly financed education would necessarily lead to a rise in youth unemployment and a retirement of firms and employers from providing apprenticeships. This general majority against the increase of publicly financed education was amplified by the Swiss federalist arena. The federal arena and the definition of Swiss VET as a "common task" between the federation, the cantons and the employers have led to the rejection of a strong involvement of the federal state. Within the balance of responsibilities between the federal state and the cantons in the field of vocational training and education, there was simply no space for a stronger federal involvement. We see that the reaction to the constraining

relationship between demand and supply of apprenticeship positions in the 1990's has not led to the introduction of more school-based training (leading to an equal qualification than those provided within apprenticeships) as reclaimed by the Swiss unionists during the LIPA initiative and the "Nahtstelle" consultations (SGB 1998, 2006).

It seems appropriate to have a short look on other countries with a similar collective skill formation regime to describe the varied responses these countries have given to the institutionalized conflict between the social aim of providing apprenticeship places for everyone and the interests of employers to reduce state-intervention and outside interference within the corporatist model of governance of the dual vocational system. Germany and Austria, whose training systems resemble the Swiss one, constitute good "most similar" cases that allow for comparison of the country-specific ways of dealing with the issue. As a matter of fact, both Germany and Austria were facing similar issues than the Swiss dual system. Germany, for instance faced a serious quantitative deterioration in the supply of apprenticeship places starting at the beginning of 1990s. Between 1975 and 2000, the number of school leavers that recurred to transitions measures<sup>14</sup> augmented by 75% (Busemeyer 2009: 22). While participation rates in upper secondary schools (leading to access to upper tertiary educational pathways) augmented considerably, access to apprenticeships for those from the lower obligatory educational tracks was considerably hampered. As a matter of fact, after German reunification, Germany responded to the lack of apprenticeship places by expanding out of company VET training in the New Eastern Länder. Nevertheless, while this policy persisted in former eastern Germany until 2010, it has never been implemented in the former Western German Länder (Granato/Ulrich 2014: 217). Just like in Switzerland, School-leavers in Germany that could not find an apprenticeship do not have a right

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14 As in Switzerland, Germany's institutional landscape of transitions measures is highly diverse in the different Länder. Roughly, one can distinguish between different school-based (put in place by the Länder) and work based (financed by the federal unemployment insurance) measures. The school-based forms of preparation to apprenticeship cover the BGJ ("Berufsgrundbildungsjahr" - vocational basic education year) and the BVJ (the "Berufsvorbereitungsjahr" - vocational preparation year). In some Länder the BGJ is recognised as a first apprenticeship year (Berlin, Lower Saxony and Baden-Wuerttemberg) (see Busemeyer 2009: 25) while the BVJ is used as a form of second chance education, as youngsters can catch up a lower secondary education certificate. The work-based measures (BVB/berufsvorbereitende Maßnahme/vocational preparation measure, put in place by the federal unemployment insurance) does not provide such a possibility and does not only focus on entry into apprenticeship but in some cases also on entry into work. In the wake of the Hartz-Reforms in 2004, the BVB-measures have been re-organised: access to these measures has been standardised and made conditional on having shown "aptitude for placement" and their duration has been shortened (see.e.g. Dressel/Pflicht 2006).

to a publicly financed apprenticeship place<sup>15</sup> (Granato/Ulrich 2014: 221). Different to Switzerland, Germany has a vocational training obligation that lasts at least for most Länder until 18 (Vossenkuhl 2010: 53). For those youngsters that do not find an apprenticeship, this VET-obligation can also be satisfied by participating in a transition measure. The latter is not the case in Switzerland, where the obligatory school period starts at the age of 4 and endures 11 years (EDK 2015). At the age of 16, no responsibility to provide educational measures is installed. Besides this longer obligatory education period, Germany seems to offer more options for remedial education, respectively to catch up a school certificate after the end of the obligatory school system (see footnote 14). It is highly interesting that the struggles around the inclusivity of the apprenticeship system that has been described for Switzerland shows a certain similarity with the early German attempts to implement a stronger state interference in cases in which the economy would not provide enough apprenticeship-places. The APFIG from 1976, supported by a judgment of the constitutional court of 10.12.1980 develops the notion of a “sufficient offer of apprenticeship places”, thus defining a rate between demand and supply that serves as a yardstick for the right of the state to raise an apprenticeship levy on firms. Here the yardstick for “sufficient” apprenticeship places requires a surplus of 12.5 % to the demand<sup>16</sup>. As has been shown above, in Switzerland, as a response to the LIPA-Initiative, the new Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act (VPETA) introduced a significantly less strict regulation on an apprenticeship-levy. This constitutes a comparatively low state intervention compared to other VET

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15 To be exact, young person that are certified by public employment services to have special needs or learning disabilities are entitled to out-of-company training while those that simply couldn't find an apprenticeship because of so called "market disadvantage" are not entitled to (Dressel/Pflicht 2006: 53).

16 Busemeyer (2009) describes that in the short period of validity of the APFIG (1976-1980) the government abstained, despite the possibility to do so, from raising an apprenticeship levy, mainly because of the administrative hurdles. Despite the reconfirmation of the principle of state intervention in case of an insufficient supply by the economy through the constitutional court In 1981, the law has been declared void because it was considered not being in line with the constitutional distribution of powers between the federal state and the Länder. As such, the enforcement of the law faced strong insecurity (see e.g. Busemeyer 2009:90-95 ff). The idea of an apprenticeship-levy was again brought into the discussion during the Schröder Government (2004) but failed - this time due to internal dispute in the social democrat party. Ulrich and Granato have shown how statistical reporting conventions on the level of the public employment service keep the demand-supply relationship low and favorable to employers, e.g. through excluding those in transition measures, setting a late cut-off date (a date when most potential apprenticeship-seekers already started looking for alternatives to apprenticeships) and through limiting registration to those who are deemed as "ready to placement" (Granato/Ulrich 2013: 220).



countries<sup>17</sup>. As Meyer puts it, “market economy driven ‘vocationalisation’ is at its maximum here” (Meyer 2009: 29).

While Austria (just like Germany and Switzerland) clearly qualifies as a collective skill formation regime (see e.g. Culpepper 2007) the Austrian VET system bears witness of a slightly different solution of the compromise between employer’s interests and the interest to provide an apprenticeship for every young person. First, historically full-time vocational schools (BMS) and vocational colleges (BHS) account for a much larger number of post-obligatory education. In Austria, only slightly 30% of upper secondary level enrolment makes up for company-based apprenticeships (in Switzerland, this amounts to 60% and in Germany to approx. 50% (Arenz and Gericke 2014: 16). According to Lassnig, Austrian VET programs that are happening within a “dual” setting thus have never had the same “monopoly position” as in Germany or Switzerland (Lassnig 2011: 416). Beside the classical apprenticeship, which is made up of 3-4 days of company-based training and 1-2 days of professional school, Austria provides two major pathways through school-based vocational education and training (see also Graf 2013: 126). The *berufsbildende mittlere Schulen* (BMS) that typically provide recognized VET-certificates for (in comparison to Germany and Switzerland, comparatively young – (see Lassnig 2011) school leavers and the BHS (*berufsbildende höhere Schulen*) that provide – in addition to a VET certificate – a certificate that provides access to higher education. As such, the much-criticized German “educational schism” (Baethge 2006), which refers to the strong institutional divide between VET and higher education and limits social mobility between both fields is less strong in Austria. In addition to this quite different qualitative design and quantitative structure of the Austrian VET-system compared to Germany and Switzerland<sup>18</sup>, Austria showed a different reaction to the crisis in the supply of apprenticeships during the 1990s economic crisis. In the 1990s, for a temporary period, state-financed institutional apprenticeships for selected individuals with transition problems (the so ÜBA (Überbetriebliche Ausbildung – supra-company apprenticeships) were implemented based on a new law (*Jugendausbildungssicherungsgesetz – JASG*) (Lassnig 2011: 431). These measures have been put on a permanent basis by including them in the Austrian VET-law, (*Berufsausbildungsgesetz*) in 2008. The target group of these supra company apprenticeships where leavers from compulsory school that could not find an apprenticeship place. Other than the “bridging offers” in Switzerland or the “transition measures”

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17 A quite interesting contrasting example in this respect is Denmark, where every private and public firm has to pay into a nationwide training fund (Arbejdsgivernes Elevrefusion/AER), no matter whether they provide training or not.

18 For a in depth discussion of the relation between VET-training, school-based VET-training and higher education see Graf (2013) and Graf/Lassnig/Powell (2012).

in Germany (the BVB, BGJ, and BVJ, see footnote 14), these supra-company apprenticeships provide a recognized VET certificate. Similarly to the BVB in Germany and the Motivational Semesters in Switzerland, they are partly financed by the public employment service. Other than the previously described measures, the Austrian ÜBA is far from being a simple waiting room for the company-based apprenticeships. The ÜBA “has been set up as an equivalent part of dual VET side by side with the regular company-based variant” (Grün/Tritscher-Archan 2009: 33). Supra-company apprenticeships are mostly organized by third sector educational organizations. An apprenticeship contract is concluded with a training provider, the public employment service pays the apprenticeship wage and the training is provided either in a supra-company workshop or in cooperation with a company-based workshop facility (see e.g. Lassnig 2011: 431). The supra-company apprenticeship-scheme is often designated as a “Ausbildungsgarantie”, a “training guarantee”, and has as such been regarded with certain envy by trade unions (see e.g. Trinko 2012; Bussi 2013), progressive educational actors<sup>19</sup> and proposed as a best practice model for the establishment of a “European youth guarantee” (European Commission, 2012: 5, 11).

But where do these differences come from? Ebner and Nikolai (2010) compare the political decisions on the relation between vocational and school-based training in Switzerland, Germany and Austria and described that in Switzerland and Germany – differently than in Austria the implementation of school-based alternatives to apprenticeships failed because of different elements: Firstly, within the Swiss federal arena, a “nationally coherent” expansion of school-based alternatives was not possible due to the fact that educational policies (and thus the implementation of school-based alternatives) are in the hand of the cantons, and because of the fact that only with the implementation of the new vocational training law in 2004, the federal level had a limited legal instrument to react to the supply-demand relation. Furthermore, Ebner and Nikolai show that the expansion of school-based elements also failed because of the opposition of employer’s organizations and the weak position of the social democratic parties. Austria in contrast – having a social-democrat majority supported by trade unions and competencies for educational policy lying at federal level, has opted for an extension of publicly funded vocational training and for a much stronger reliance on school-based VET-options. According to these authors, the distribution of key legal competences between federal level and cantonal/country level acts as either a brake or a catalysator for the expansion of full-time school alternatives for apprenticeships.

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19 See for instance the report “possibilities for the establishment of a training guarantee with integrated apprenticeship-assistance in German law” by Christina Düsseldorf and Anna Rosendahl that has been commissioned by the German corporatist organization of youth social work in 2014).

### 2.4.1. The Emergence of Transition Management and the Birth of Transition Policies

As described in the previous chapter, all parliamentary initiatives that would tackle the unfavorable demand-supply relation by installing certifying school-based educational pathways were effectively blocked. The Swiss VET system remained on a reform trajectory that – differently to Austria’s youth guarantee – would fully leave the access to upper secondary education to a market coordination mode. The introduction of the new VET-act nevertheless contained an incremental change respective to the previous status quo, a incremental change that was both compatible to the distribution of competencies between the cantons, the federal level and the organizations and the world of work and the latent rebuttal of “etastistic” strategies that a conservative majority in the parliament stood for. After all, differently than requested by the LIPA initiative, which foresaw a federal fund for vocational training through which firm external full-time education could be installed, the federal level only gets attributed a secondary role, insofar it measures “aim at supporting financially, as far as possible, the initiatives of the cantons and the organizations if the world of work” (§ 1, 2 bis). Furthermore, Article 12 states that the “cantons can take measures to prepare person with individual educational deficits at the end of obligatory schooling to prepare them to vocational training” reports the organization of compensatory measures to the cantons. In addition, the formulation of “young persons with educational deficits” operates as an individualized problem description, attributing the difficulties to access an apprenticeship to educational deficits of the young person’s rather than to a structural mismatch. Finally, §13 allows the federal state to intervene in those cases an “imbalance” on the apprenticeship market appears and the §7 allows the confederation to “promote VPET initiatives intended to help disadvantaged regions and groups” (VPETA 2004). As the various failed initiatives on the promotion of the situation on the apprenticeship market in the year 2005 showed, it was not to be expected that the federal level would gain more leverage in the development of transition policies. The years following the introduction of the new VET law in 2004 were thus restricted to measures at the level of trans-cantonal coordination and the application of the limited mandate that was given through the new articles §3, §7 and §12.

The development of measures for tackling youth unemployment and the problem of the apprenticeship crisis were devolved on the level of inter-cantonal coordination. The role of concordats derives from Swiss federalism according to which some political areas (amongst other – educational policy) are in the responsibility of the cantons. In particular, the mechanism of inter-cantonal coordination has gained impetus through the positive vote of an “educational article” in the Swiss constitution (§ 61a) in the year 2006, a constitutional article that provides the cantons and the federal state with a competence to “coordinate their efforts

and their cooperation through common organs and other measures” (§ 61a Swiss constitution). This constitutes a form of Soft Law – in which change in the cantonal education policies does not happen within top-down prescriptions but in (often lengthy) exchange and coordination processes. Through concordats, specific cantonal laws are harmonized without the need for a law on the federal level. One of the first measures taken within this new inter-cantonal mode of policy-making was issued in 2006 on initiative of the EDK/CDIP, the inter-cantonal conference of directorates of education. The project “optimization of the interface between obligatory school and upper secondary education” (abbreviated name: Nahtstelle) was not a concordat in the sense of legally binding decision, but rather constituted an inter-cantonal and cross-sectional working group on initiative of actors from the obligatory school system that aimed at optimizing the transition from school to work. The main focus of the project was to provide apprenticeships for every young person and to reduce time losses in transitions (for instance through participating in a transition measure) through a systematic and Swiss wide introduction of early intervention schemes. The governance group of this project was staffed with actors from the obligatory school departments, officers from the federal office for VET, cantonal offices for VET and representatives of employers. The project was planned to endure until 2010 and to be continuously re-assessed. In October 2006, the project partners decided on a common commitment to engage in their respective fields of action to ensure that the number of young persons with an upper secondary education reaches 95% until 2015. The project partners furthermore decided on the elaboration of common “guidelines” for the organization of the transition from school to work that – based on best practice models and information exchange should guide the development of transition policies in the cantons. In the meanwhile, the project partner of the Nahtstelle project issued general, non-binding “guidelines” for the different actors at Transition 1. In order to reach the goal of a 95% upper secondary education rate until 2015, obligatory schooling and upper secondary education needed to be better coordinated. This was to be reached through establishing diagnostic instruments in the 8th year of the obligatory school (early monitoring) in order to identify risk groups as early as possible assessing performance at school, but also the maturity of career choice and social and personal competencies of a pupil (a.). The educational standards for obligatory school had to furthermore be coordinated with employers – as such competence profiles (b.) that also serve as “guideline for the selection of potential apprentices” (EDK 2006: 2) where expected to be established be established for most professions and serve as an informational basis for employers but also parents and pupils regarding their professional choices. For the project partners, it seemed important to “avoid the insidious augmentation of the age of transitions” (c.) (ibid.: 3). It was argued that the transition to work had to ideally directly follow finishing the 9<sup>th</sup> class and that measures should be implemented to assure this. As

such, also transition measures needed to be re-assessed from the perspective of their contribution to a fast labor-market integration. A third dimension was the development and better the coordination of bridging offers (d.), as “around 20% of the youngsters require additional measures” (ibid.: 5) in order to gain access to an apprenticeship. The character of these bridging offers, so it went would have to be equipped “with certifying elements” (ibid. 2006b: 4). Last but not least, the “character of the different transition measures” would have to have been assessed from the background of the stated goals and be based on the skills profile of the applicant and individual action plans. The last goal was the promotion of inter-institutional collaboration between the different administrations that had to do with young persons in transition.

#### **2.4.2. Individual Counseling and the Early Identification of Risk-Groups**

Regarding a.) The early identification of risk groups, one of the partners of the Nahtstelle project – the BBT – developed a concept of case-management in the realm of VET (Case-management Berufsbildung – CMBB) through which the cantons could receive funding for the establishment of a follow up system designed for young persons at risk of not finding out an apprenticeship. While the federation could not prescribe to the cantons to implement specific measures through hard law, the new VET-law gave the federation the possibility to finance and initiate projects proposed by the VET-partners. As such the BBT financed the elaboration of a concept and funded staff. In return, cantonal projects had to correspond to minimal criteria issued by the federation. One of the central minimal criteria was that the CMBB had to allow an “early identification, registration, and continuous observation of the risk group” (BBT 2007: 3) that starts at the 7/8 school year of obligatory schooling. Furthermore, it aimed at coordinating the different actors that are operating at the transition from school to work and was deemed to provide a kind of counseling/coaching to youngsters that were at risk of or that failed to enter an apprenticeship immediately after obligatory schooling.

#### **2.4.3. Standardizing the “Matching” Process**

The implementation of skill profiles for VET-professions and the mandatory implementation of “competence profiles” for the young persons was largely influenced by a pilot project in the canton of Zurich, in which young people were submitted to a competence profile test in the 9<sup>th</sup> school year followed by a counseling session with the young person and his parents (Kammerman/Siegrist 2007). Nevertheless, for the Nahtstelle project, the aim was not simply to introduce a kind of assessment instrument at the end of obligatory schooling that could serve as an orientation for the young person regarding his potential job choices, but to pursue a “match”

between the recently developed standards for obligatory schooling (emerging from a larger coordination process in which the contents of curriculums were standardized across Switzerland HARMOS)) and the skill profiles of the organizations of the world of work, that is, profiles that define which competencies are required for a specific profession. The “match” between applicant and job position would ideally happen through a standardized assessment that provides standardized and objective knowledge on the individual “fit” of an applicant. For instance, one sub-project of the Nahtstelle-consortium carried out by the EDK and the Swiss chamber of commerce (SGV) aimed at to provide skills profiles for over 250 professions that are based on the HARMOS competence profiles for language, natural sciences, and Math (Zahno 2012). Young people would as such be confronted with the specific prerequisites for different jobs already at obligatory schooling and ideally, choose an apprenticeship where their skills fit the competencies as required by the employers. The large-scale introduction of standardized tests had to have – according to the guidelines – two main functions. Firstly, it should “allow young persons in the course of obligatory schooling – to compare their competency level with the skill requirements of the chosen profession and then draw conclusions” (Nahtstelle 2010: 35). The standardized assessments were thus meant to serve as prime information for vocational guidance and guide young person “process of choosing a profession” (ibid. 26). Secondly, it “should provide data for the selection of apprentices, which means, give information to the companies if a young person fulfills the competency standards required for the professions” (ibid: 38). On the side of obligatory schooling, the curricula of obligatory schooling were meant to be harmonized (made possible through the installation of a constitutional article on education in 2006 according to which cantons are enforced to coordinate their curricula’s) and through the Harmos “concordat” (2007) according to which the quality of cantonal school systems should be assessed through Swiss-wide inter-cantonal defined “competence standards” which pupils should achieve. This “match” between the (individual) outcomes of obligatory schooling and the definition of competence standards on the level of employers, was meant to render the “matching process” between young persons and employers more effective. At the same time, it should give young people an appropriate assessment of their real competence level, and as such – incite them to choose apprenticeships for which their competency level where appropriate. This was meant to reduce the number of young people dropping out of apprenticeship schemes because they were not up to the school requirements at professional schools, and at the same time, give an objective appraisal of the apprenticeship sector to which they really could aspire to.

#### 2.4.4. Transition Measures and the Promotion of a “Fast” Transition from School to Work

While the Nahtstelle-project admitted that a restricted number of young people would, despite the new efforts not be able to find an apprenticeship directly after school – it also showed a quite ambivalent position towards so-called transition measures. On the one hand, they were seen as being part of the problem – the transition to upper secondary VET education was expected to happen directly after obligatory school (Nahstelle 2006: 3) and the extensive provision of transition measures by the cantons would potentially undermine the aim to “reduce the entry age into apprenticeships” (ibid: 4). The aim to re-assess the cantonal offer of transition measures from the perspective of their contribution to fast labor-market integration and the development and better the coordination of bridging offers was thus seen as crucial for the project. On the one side, it was clear that in the light of the situation on the apprenticeship market, a considerable range of youngsters were required to draw back on a transition measure. On the other side, the extensive use of transition measures by youngsters who would not objectively need them, who would use them to enhance their chances to enter an apprenticeship in another profession or just “take a year off” would lead to a rise of the entry age into the labor market. As such, the access to transitions measures was to be better regulated and their use not be seen as a default mode. For the Nahtstelle actors, the concern for an “optimization” of transitions was confronted by a utilization of transition measures by youngsters that simply followed a rational logic when considering the biographic dimension of job choices. As the Swiss educational report of the Year 2010 describes, “compulsory school graduates who do not find their “desired apprenticeship” prefer not to take up a different apprenticeship but to wait a year before searching in the same occupation again” (Educational Report 2010: 158). This constitutes, according to the authors of the educational report an “efficiency problem: [...] If the chances are slim that a student will find his/her desired apprenticeship after waiting a year, this constitutes an efficiency problem for both the individual and society” (ibid. 158-159). Furthermore, the report suggested that there exists an independent effect of the cantonal offer of transition measures on the number of young people in transition measures. The more transition measures a canton implements, and the easier they are accessible, the larger the extent to which young persons rely on them (Educational Report 2010: 156). The youth unemployment rate is – in this rationale – not explained by the situation on the labor market, but by a disincentivizing structure of transition measures leading to the fact that young persons do not enter the apprenticeship system. When framed like this, the idea that too easy access to transition measures incites young persons to choose a transition measure over an apprenticeship makes sense. Access to transition measures should thus be “regulated”, respectively – made dependent on a

prior assessment, in order to assess the need (and the viability) of participation in a transition measure. Accordingly, to “prevent the insidious augmentation of the entry age into apprenticeship” (Nahtstelle 2006), and in order to prevent this “waste of resources” (Swiss educational report 2010: 159) the access to transition measures would have to be better regulated. The suggestion by the Nahtstelle project to base the job choices of youngsters on standardized tests, to monitor youngsters through the CMBB and to limit the allocation of transition measures through other actors (e.g. the public employment service) bears witness of these aims. This is even more explicit in a statement by the Swiss employer’s association, expressed during the consultation process for the renewal of the Nahtstelle project. Here, concerns for the “demand-driven expansion of bridging offers” (Schweizerischer Arbeitgeberverband 2011: 5, own translation) are expressed and cantons are called to limit these measures “to an appropriate number, in order to prevent an unnecessary delay of labor-market integration” (ibid.).

As a part of the Nahtstelle project’s activities, the BBT commissioned a research report on the cantonal transition measures. This report was conducted by the private research Institute “Egger Dreher and Partner” (2007). The specificity of this report, albeit commissioned from the Background of the VET law, strongly focused on the social consequences of a not accessing an apprenticeship by young persons with particular deficits. The report drew on administrative data of the unemployment insurance and used the TREE-dataset in order to provide a systematized overview of “all transition measures in Switzerland”<sup>20</sup> (Egger, Dreher und Partner, 2007: 3). The study concluded that a risk group of “2000 to 2500 do, in a permanent manner not manage to enter in the employment system and dispose of a high-risk potential to be recurrently or even permanently dependent on welfare benefits” (ibid.: 53). This would “produce considerable costs for social insurance systems” (ibid). Secondly, this report analysed, for the first time in history six different cantonal transition systems in its entirety and compared their interaction with the “population flow” of young people leaving school. The study showed that despite the very heterogeneous organization of the transition systems in different cantons, they all were not fit to appropriately support young people with low motivation and with more specific deficits. As Egger Dreher and Partner (2007) describe, in all cantons, only those pupils that have a “basic motivation” can enter

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20 The importance of the mentioned study lies in the fact that until now no comparative studies on cantonal transition systems existed. As educational policies and social policies are fully in the competence in the cantons, no specific need for such study existed. Secondly, no federal political institution would be allowed to commission such a study - this would have been seen as a transgression of the federal competencies. But with the implementation of the VET-act - operating as a “framework law” for the coordination of activities between the different actors, and the call of the “Nahtstelle” -guidelines to assess the “character” of the different transition measures, such a possibility was finally given.



transition measures. For those young people who “have no interest in a transition measure” (ibid. 46) no mechanism exists that prevents that they “drop-out”. The report thus problematized the principle of “voluntariness”: “in none of the six cantons young persons are pushed to search a transition measure – nor exists any explicit mandate to ensure that all young people have a transition measure” (Egger Dreher and Partner 2007: 46, own translation). The report stated that the current organization of the transition system in the six analysed cantons was poorly equipped to account for those 3% percent of young persons that where, in the terms of the report “unwilling” and “unmotivated” to search for an apprenticeship or to enroll for a transition measure and thus at risk of dropping out on a long-term basis. The report strongly emphasized the “incentive structures” of the different transition systems presented to the young people, for instance, the – Motivational Semesters – through providing a small monetary allowance may incite young people not to search for an apprenticeship and to choose - according to a rational choice model - welfare over work. In addition, it was stated that providers of transition measures -being allowed to choose their participants themselves – have incentives to choose only those participants that have a high probability of finding an apprenticeship. This cherry-picking would be detrimental for those that are not “willing” to search for an apprenticeship or that are not motivated as stated by the report. As no long-term case management exists, so the report goes, “providers of transition measures are not responsible for what happens to a young person after one year” (ibid. 2006: 38, own translation). As such, it is criticized that transition measures are sometimes not attributed to objective need, but simply constitute a waiting loop that unnecessarily delays labor-market entry.

At the end of the Nahtstelle project in the Year 2010, it became clear that some of the most innovative reforms of the “Nahtstelle” project regarding transition measures could not be implemented, mainly because of the resistance of employers and educational providers. For instance, the idea to implement certified qualification periods in transition measures which should be recognized as a first year of apprenticeship for a subsequent apprenticeship in a firm (a policy known in Germany under the name “Einstiegsqualifizierung”) had to be abandoned “due to the difficulties in defining and translating these qualification instruments and due to the lacking willingness of secondary education providers to recognize these certificates” (Nahtstelle 2010: 28). Employers successfully rejected the introduction of “certifying elements” in the so-called transition measures. While the employers agreed to establish a new low threshold apprenticeship certificate with the reduced duration of 2 Years (the EBA – Eidgenössisches Berufsattest) that should particularly benefit youngsters with low educational credentials, they fiercely resisted the introduction of qualification elements in transition measures, as these would undermine their control over access to apprenticeship certificates. As the SGV/USAM states in their 2010 report on vocational training, “it is in the responsi-

bility of the cantons to provide educational pathways outside of the national qualification frameworks for those who are not able to follow an EBA-apprenticeship” (Berufsbildungsbericht SGV 2010: 11, own translation). Employers organizations rejected the responsibility to take care of youngsters that do not fit the requirements of these simpler apprenticeship-pathways. The SGV stressed the claim that training offers “can only be developed in agreement with the national Oda (organizations of the world of work), other cantonal offers are not desirable” (ibid. 2010: 12). The positions of the SGV regarding the “transition” program of the EDK were firm but clear. Under no circumstances should the cantons abuse the official educational pathways as “welfare institutions in order to reduce unemployment statistics” (Berufsbildungsbericht SGV 2010: 12, own translation). Employers organizations were very successful in maintaining their sovereignty of defining the contents, the entry-requirements and the examinations of different vocational apprenticeships. As the SGV states, “in order to avoid cantonal (instead of national) educational pathways, the economy can solely help to through providing skill assessments in order to verify the trainability” of the young persons” (ibid.). In a nutshell – employer’s organizations offered their services for selecting and over-seeing the quality of potential employees to delineate which young persons could be trained and which were not amenable to an apprenticeship.

#### **2.4.5. Interinstitutional Collaboration and the Rise of Educationfare**

A third central element of the Nahtstelle project consisted in the realization of collaboration between the different administrations that were dealing with young persons without an apprenticeship, and the development of a common strategy for the overall transition system. For the Nahtstelle project, a central concern was the clarification of the tensions between Motivational Semesters (provided by the public employment service) and other transition measures provided by educational actors. For the Nahtstelle actors, all having a background in obligatory schooling and from VET-system administration, it didn’t seem appropriate to allocate transition measures through the public employment service as “young persons find themselves to early in the role of unemployed” (Nahtstelle 2006b: 3, own translation). This refers to a controversy on the role of the Motivational Semesters within the transition system that happened a few years earlier, linked to the reform of the unemployment insurance. The Motivational Semesters, a measure that targets school leavers after obligatory schooling who could not find an apprenticeship, was described as problematic measure not in line with the political will to increase the rate of participants in secondary vocational training. Firstly, the provision of monetary benefits (around 450 CHF) was considered to be a disincentive for young people to apply for apprenticeships, deliberately choosing Motivational Semesters over (often more educationally oriented) measures provided by the cantons. As these measures do

not provide any monetary benefits, they would constitute a concurrency to measures that were eventually better fit to favor the integration into the apprenticeship system. Concerns were expressed that labor-market measures were an unruly focus on fast labor market integration rather than entry into an apprenticeship. Last but not least, the attribution of measures – thus the decision if a youngster is admitted to a Motivational Semester – was in the hands of the public employment service and would happen in an incidental and random manner (Zysset 2008). As a response to these problems, on 27<sup>th</sup> of April 2007 the EDK, the SODK (Swiss Conference of cantonal directors of social assistance) and the VDK (Swiss Conference of directorates of economy) issued a common position paper on vocational and social integration of young people, in which they stated their willingness for a better collaboration between educational policies, labor-market policies, and social assistance. The paper made it clear that “being without an upper secondary certificate and unemployment at the beginning of working life would have dramatic negative consequences for individuals and puts a strong burden on economy and society alike” (CDIP, CDAS and CDEP 2007: 1). While they saw youth unemployment as a temporary problem that would be solved by itself during the next economic upturn, special measures had to be implemented to ensure the vocational, social and economic independence of those young people that are exposed to a “particular risk” (ibid.). The paper consisted of propositions and suggestions to the respective cantonal directorates. The three departments declared that “despite the fact that we do not dispose of a legal basis allowing an obligatory follow-up of young person after obligatory schooling, it is nevertheless possible to systematically monitor those young people who did not find a solution after obligatory schooling” (common position of the CDIP CDAS and CDEP 2007: 3) and argued to “propose them (youngsters, S.D.) adequate measures” which are considered “more effective than a prolongation of the obligatory school age above 16 Years” (ibid.: 3). In addition, they re-affirm the principle of “educational measures before labor market measures” (ibid.: 1). This call was amongst others be taken up by the SKOS, the Swiss conference of cantonal directors of social assistance that highlighted the fact that “from the perspective of the welfare state, investing in qualifications is considered as a social investment” (CSIAS 2007). As such, it made the recommendation to its members that a “duty to train, above the obligatory school age, should be requested – and that youngsters should feel pressure from all involved actors to do an initial vocational training” (CSIAS/SKOS 2007, own translation). Also, the 4<sup>th</sup> reform of the unemployment insurance in 2010 took up this call. Unemployment insurance benefits for youngsters aged 16-25 have been subjected to stronger conditionality, and the criteria for a “reasonable job offer” (thus the conditions under which unemployed must take up a job offer at the risk of sanctions) have become stricter for persons aged under 30. The waiting period before receiving benefits was augmented to 120 days and the duration of benefit entitlement significantly reduced

(from 260 to 90 days) for those persons that had not previously paid insurance contributions. This measure particularly touched young people after obligatory schooling that must wait 6 months before gaining access to benefits. These measures, as can be seen abundantly in the parliamentary discussions (see particularly the parliamentary discussions NR 2009: 575), were driven by a concern for the provision of incentives to make employment more attractive than unemployment insurance, respectively to increase the pressure to take up an apprenticeship<sup>21</sup>.

## 2.5. From the Emergence of a Problem Towards the Construction of a Policy

This description of the development of transitions policies in Switzerland serves as an example of how “youth”- as a category of public becomes a central politically contested issue within debates on Social Policy. Zinnecker proposes to analyze the construction of youth as a contested “field of struggle” (Zinnecker 2003), in which experts, government agencies, and diverse societal actors participate. Based on the conception of youth as a life-course phase, he proposes to analyze the political regulation of the “institutionalized” moratorium of the youth phase. He proposes the following leading questions to sensibilise for processes of political regulation of the youth phase: “Who is legitimate to formulate the goals of the youth program? Who administers and controls the cohorts of youth and its subgroups? Who is profiting from the youth moratorium and who gets the mining rights for the human capital generated during the youth Moratorium? Who pays the considerable costs that a youth moratorium generates?” (Zinnecker 2003: 57, own translation). The discussions about the installation of a “right to vocational training”, the parliamentary discussions on the question of how much state intervention is needed and appropriate in the field of vocational training, the adaptations of different policy field to the principle “vocational training before unemployment insurance” (Nahtstelle 2010), but also the concrete policy developments regulating the access to different institutionalized pathways can be interpreted as struggles on the institutionalization of the youth phase. As has been described in the previous chapter, not only leg-

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21 It is highly probable that the reduction of duration and amount of unemployment benefits was influenced by a public discourse which problematized the existence of SeMo's (see Zysset 2008 for a thorough discussion). Motivational Semesters were denounced for their stigmatizing effect and for send the wrong signals to young school leavers who find themselves “too early in the role of unemployed” (see for instance the parliamentary motion 07.3790 from 10.12.2007 by national counsellor Otto Ineichen). The provision of unemployment benefits would constitute a dis-incitement for young people to search for an apprenticeship place, and SeMo's would - in certain cases - not act in concordance with the principle “education before employment” (Nahtstelle 2010).

islative actors and the different state departments but also actors of the economy, NGO's in the field of youth, educational departments and labor-market economists played a central role in these struggles. The discussion on the reforms of the VET system is characterized by controversies between the educational system and the economic system where the latter successfully influenced the educational system to be fashioned according to the needs of the economy. The discussions on the reform of the VET act leave no doubt on the fact that the question of transitions from school to work is – at the end of the day – inextricably linked to the regulation of the future workforce of the Swiss economy. While the Swiss vocational training system always oscillated between the promotion of education and the promotion of the economy, it seems to have undergone some more dramatic changes within the second phase of development of transition policies. This has an impact on the conception the youth phase. As described in the first chapter, the youth phase as a life-course phase came into being during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the socio-structural breakthrough of industrial capitalism. The demand for a skilled labor force leads to the increased exemption from work and to the de-location of the social “space” of youth from the factory to the school. This socio-economic moratorium based on state-supported age-graded markers is increasingly reviewed along principles of public action following the principles of “social investment”. The (limited, if existent) state intervention pointed towards youth – in its early days – was aiming at securing at least to a minimum the subsistence of those not being needed by the economy. Transition measures like the Motivational Semester, paired with the implementation of benefit entitlements for school leavers – were a public policy arrangement for youth that acted as a substitute to the market. Within the social investment paradigm, the finalities of state intervention have changed: Policy measures like the SeMo are not simply legal vessels aiming at an artificial prolongation of the preparatory phase to employment, but they are made relevant in terms of a substantial investment in the human capital of young persons. In contrast to the idea of a prolonged educational moratorium and more general education, educational governance seems to have taken a form of increased regulation of youth as the future workforce.

### 2.5.1. Contradictions of the Swiss Transition Regime

This incremental change of the Swiss transition regime is also exemplified through at first sight quite contradictory finalities. On the one side, a “right to vocational education” (the LIPA-initiative – see the previous chapter) that would have resulted in an elongation of the obligatory school age and generated costs for the provision of secondary vocational training has clearly been dismissed on the grounds not to “socialize” the VET-system, to prevent a potential mismatch between the skills of the workforce and the labor force needs of the economy, and a fierce opposi-

tion by the economy that was fearing the loss of sovereignty over conferring VET-certifications. On the other hand, the loose agreement between the different actors on the Nahtstelle led to the installation of a federal benchmark according to which the number of secondary education diplomas should be augmented from 88% to 95%. On the other side, the principle of “education before unemployment” (Nahtstelle 2010) found large recognition. The (lack) of educational credentials is increasingly seen as a financial risk for the state, as it increases the risk of unemployment and of benefit dependency. As the Egger, Dreher and Partner report criticized, “no institution has neither an incentive, nor a responsibility to ensure a “continuous follow-up” of that 3% of school leavers with a severe risk to stay out of the apprenticeship-system” (Egger Dreher and Partner 2007: 7, own translation). While, actors from social insurance increasingly highlighted that the “duty to train, above the obligatory school age should be requested – young persons should feel a pressure from all involved actors to do an initial vocational training” (CSIAS/SKOS 2007: 2, own translation) no demand-side measures (e.g. qualifying elements in so-called transition measures) have been implemented. In addition, the 4<sup>th</sup> reform of the unemployment insurance introduced cost containment measures that particularly reinforced the conditionality principles for young persons and reduced benefit duration and waiting period considerably.

These contradictions show that the reforms did not primarily aim at facilitating the access to VET, but to re-arrange of transition systems according to robust incentive structures that enhance the propensity of young persons to look for an apprenticeship. It seems as if transition policies changed from a “retention basin”, a “waiting room” (Heinimann 2006) for those that could not find an apprenticeship towards a policy that directly aims at the enhancement of individual availability for the labor market. During the reform process, the problem of potentially wrong incentives of transition systems that lead young persons to prefer other “suboptimal” solutions like for instance transition measures or “doing nothing” (Egger et.al 2007: 58) to an apprenticeship played a central role. The 2010 educational report described that offering too many transition measures could result in giving incentives for youngsters to stay at home (Educational report 2010: 156). Within this model, the individual (young person) is seen as a homo oeconomicus, who – if given the wrong incentives – rationally chooses to stay out of an apprenticeship. The problem, so it goes, is neither a lack of apprenticeship places, nor the virtues or vices of the young person that behave perfectly rational in choosing welfare over work, but the “incentive structures” that have to be re-designed towards faster labor-market entry. In this logic, the “model of rational-economic action serves as a principle for justifying and limiting governmental action” (Lemke 2001: 197). Or in the rationale of the reforms of the transition system: Do not provide too many transition measures, young persons will choose welfare over training. This is – as Lemke shows – characteristic for a form of neoliberal governmentality in which governmental

practices are assessed by means of market concepts: “It allows these practices to be assessed, to show whether they are excessive or entail abuse, and to filter them in terms of the interplay of supply and demand” (Lemke 2001: 198). The regulation of the workforce through this new economic arrangement can be described as form of neo-liberal governmentality in which a “re-definition of the social sphere as a form of the economic domain” (Lemke: 2001: 198) takes place. The youth moratorium and its “inhabitants” are increasingly evaluated from an economic viewpoint that highlights its costs and its later utility. The call for the prevention of a “insidious augmentation of the entry age into apprenticeship” (Nahtstelle 20010: 27) and the concern for an “optimization” of transitions that prevents biographical detours and ensures a fast economic self-sufficiency bear witness of this process. These changes can be appropriately described within a larger process in which the relation between the capitalist economy and the state changes. In classical political economy, the specific qualitative aspects of “human capital” are not seen as a factor to be influenced by the state. State intervention was limited to securing – in an extensive way, the living conditions of those people that dropped out of the economic process. In the change from a “Keynesian Welfare State” towards a “Schumpeterian Workfare State”, government policies are – due to a flexible global economy – less able and willing to take influence through national economic policies. They rather focus on the enhancement of “structural competitiveness of open economies mainly through supply-side intervention and to subordinate social policy to the demands of labor market flexibility” (Jessop 1993: 19). As Jessop describes, “activation policy also extends into education and training and not just unemployment insurance and social security” (Jessop 2005: 165). In this era, the skills and capacities of the labor force as a central vector on which the government can have an influence. State policies thus – to put it bluntly – increasingly opt for “a policy of growth which will no longer be simply indexed to the problem of the material investment of physical capital, on the one hand, and of the number of workers, [on the other], but a policy of growth-focused precisely on one of the things that the West can modify most easily, and that is the form of investment in human capital” (Foucault 2008: 232). The changing language in which the problem of “transitions” is addressed in political discourse seems to bear witness of this process. Rather than intervening in the market mode of coordination of the vocational training system (see the previous chapter), the government decided to focus on “incentive structures” (the carrot), on “pressure” (the stick) and on individualized counseling of a limited risk-group.

### 2.5.2. Discursive Shifts: From Youth Unemployment to “Youth at Risk”

The transformation of transition policies was accompanied by an important discursive shift – while youth unemployment was largely seen as outcome of struc-

tural problems of the swiss economy during the 1990s, the implementation of the VET-act paralleled with more individualized problem descriptions. Research had identified that transition problems were restricted to a small group of 3-5% of a cohort and that these could be clearly identified by specific risk factors. These groups would dispose of “multidimensional deficits” (Egger, Dreher and Partner 2007; CMBB 2010) and would, therefore, require more specific support, a support that the new VET-law foresaw. In addition, the situation on the apprenticeship-market allegedly got better, and the fact that a certain number of apprenticeship places were left free led to a discussion in which policies were more and more thinking about ways to reduce disincentives for young people to enter apprenticeships. The lack of apprenticeship places is redefined as a lack of educational competencies by young persons and as such redefined as an *educational* problem. While the structural scarcity of apprenticeship places was a central narrative of the discourse in the 1998s, the reframing of youth unemployment takes, since the stronger involvement of the OPET and the higher availability and recourse to scientific knowledge<sup>22</sup> a shape that focusses on the behavior and the characteristics of the population in question. This discourse has some strong similarities with the discourse on “NEET’s” (not in education, employment, and training) in the UK (Scott/Payne 2006) and on the European level (Mascherini 2019) that is increasingly used to frame the problem of youth unemployment. While in official documents and research reports (a research report from the TREE-consortium making a rare exception) no direct reference to the term NEET’ s can be found, the similarities in terms of basic presuppositions are multifarious: Firstly, just like in the UK, the

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22 A early OECD report on the transition from school to work in Switzerland (Galley/Meyer 1998) stated that Switzerland had a huge knowledge gap on transitions which constitute a kind of “black box” (ibid. 54) due to the lack of coherent administrative, but also scientific, longitudinal Data. This situation changed with the publishing of the results of the first PISA-assessment (2000), the start of the transition panel “TREE” (2000), the national research program “education and employment” (NFP43- 2000). The introduction of “barometer of apprenticeship places” (2006) regularly monitoring the situation on the apprenticeship market, and finally the different reports commissioned within the Nahtstellen-project. Bear witness of the huge increase in knowledge production on young people. This was also strongly driven by politico-administrative concerns of governing unemployed youth. The development of the TREE Study is a prime example of this development: While research based on three data yielded invaluable knowledge on the transition processes of young persons and inequalities of the Swiss VET system, it also constituted a prime source of knowledge for the effects of policies on the transition pathways of young person and was largely exploited for government-commissioned reports (Egger Dreher and Partner 2007, 2008, Educational report 2010) aiming at providing government knowledge and at making young persons “knowable”. It comes as no surprise that the discourse of young people as “risk subjects”, the identification of particular “risk groups” and a particular emphasis on the specific individual deficits is born in this period.



emergence of the term NEET's corresponded to a change in administrative categories, in which benefit entitlements were reduced to youngsters under the age of 25 (Yates/Payne 2006: 331). Youth unemployment and the status of an unemployed worker below 25 years was replaced with the term NEET's. While we cannot observe the same change in Switzerland, the changing focus from "unemployed youth" towards "youth with difficulties" (VET-act) or "youth at risk" corresponds to a redefinition of the aim of transition measures. Young persons should not be treated as "unemployed" (because of the potential stigmatizing effects, but also because unemployment benefits would present a negative incentive to stay out of apprenticeships) but should predominantly be oriented towards measures in the education system: "Education before unemployment" (Nahtstelle 2010). The emergence of the "youth at risk" – discourse is an outcome of a contradictory element of the implementation of the Swiss transition regime: on the one side, no real institutional responsibility for the transition period was established: Legally "it is no explicit task of the state to ensure that young persons at the end of obligatory schooling are provided with a transitory solution, neither do young persons have the duty to look for one" (Egger, Dreher and Partner 2007: 20, own translation). The fact that the legislator has abstained from introducing a higher age of obligatory schooling (which would have come with a responsibility to provide a sufficient number of training places) set a limit to state involvement in the post obligatory schooling period. On the other side, young people in transition, especially those that would potentially not be able to do a fluent and instant transition to the apprenticeship system constituted a relevant target group of state intervention. The policy case-management vocational training (CMBB 2010), introduced in the wake of their "Nahtstelle" reforms constituted a compromise between these two contradictory aims of state intervention. Here, important claims of the Egger et. al report have been taken up. The problem that young persons with a low motivation could simply "hide" from the institutional radar, and that no institution had an incentive, neither a responsibility to ensure a "continuous follow-up" (Egger Dreher and Partner 2006: 21) of those 3% of school leavers with a severe risk to stay out of the apprenticeship-system was resolved through a "identification and monitoring of the risk group" (OPET 2007) and the implementation of a "systematic monitoring of the risk groups from obligatory schooling on" (CMBB 2010). Faced with restricted capacities to prescribe top-down policies to the cantons, the BBT (the federal office for vocational training) implemented the CMBB-project through non-directive agenda setting, normative pressures and bench-marking and the provision of (financial) incentives for cantons. As Kraus (2010) argues, this mode of governance reminds in many characteristics to the open method of coordination in the European Union policy architecture. The OFFT/BBT did therefore not provide a "readymade model" but stated minimal criteria to which cantonal offices had to comply if they wanted to be eligible for funding. Cantons were given financial incentives to develop a cantonal case-

management concept that had to tackle specific issues. These cantonal concepts had to develop a systematic inventory of existing measures, designate the actors that participate, and describe the processes through which young persons would be accompanied (BBT/SBBK 2008). It is indicative that 4 of the 8 points were referring to the identification, diagnosis and monitoring and tracking of the “risk-group” that the cantonal case-management offices had to take account of. In an analysis of the cantonal concepts that had to be submitted to the BBT in order to receive funding, Kraus (2010: 297) identifies three main argumentation lines for the introduction of the CMBB. A “legalist” argumentation, referring to the articles 3, 7 and 12 in the newly established VET-law, a “collectivist” argumentation, referring to the costs that persons without an apprenticeship generate for the state (ibid. 300), and an individualist argumentation that highlights the right (to VET) and the obligation of the young person to cooperate in one’s own integration trajectory. In short, the argumentation rather refers to the prevention of potential human-capital losses linked to the “drop-out” of youngsters of a specific risk-group rather than adequate socio-political framing of the youth moratorium. This amounts to a productivist re-interpretation of the youth-moratorium under activation-pedagogical signs (Dahmen and Ley 2016). Different to the access to particular “welfare rights” that are bound to the citizenship status of young persons aiming a securing subsistence through transfer-payments (Chevalier 2017), we are witnessing a “productivist reordering of social policy” (Lister 2003: 430) where the prevention of future costs is key concern. Furthermore, the high emphasis put on young person’s individual deficits, omnipresent in the parliamentary discussions on the reform of the VET Law, resonates within discourses of self-responsibility and parallels the specific focus of activation reforms on younger people (see chapter 2.3.2). This impression finds confirmation when looking at the intended implementation of the case-management vocational training schemes. In a recommendatory document by the swiss conference of cantonal offices for VET as well as their federal counterpart, the BBT, “Case-management professional training” is described as aiming at “help to self-help (empowerment)” (BBT 2007: 1, own translation) for disadvantaged youth. It recommends to conditionalize welfare benefits on the consent to participate ineducational measures (ibid.: 11) and suggests the use of “contractual agreements” between the case manager and the young person in order to “responsibilize” the young person (ibid.: 3). As such, CMBB endorses the activation discourse to a certain extent. It focuses on supply-side interventions through working on a young person’s behavioral dispositions and job choices. This illustrates a discursive shift from “lack of employment” to a “lack of employability” (Garsten/Jacobsson 2004) that is visible in the recent development of swiss transition policies. This implies the institutionalization of new expectations towards the subject. The subject itself, insofar it potentially causes a potential cost to the collective through refusing to get an apprenticeship has to adapt to different circumstances (for instance to a specific

pattern of labor-force demand). This “shift in the rights and duties of the welfare state and citizens” (Valkenburg 2007: 29) can be interpreted as a re-arrangement of the status of citizenship from “status to contract” (Handler 2003) – benefits are not subject to eligibility by citizenship-status but are made conditional on the citizen to behave responsibly.

### 3. Life-Course, Biography and Social Policy

#### The Social and Political Regulation of the Youth Phase

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The previous chapter has shown that youth as a life-course phase constitutes a contested field of struggle between different actors. I have tried to show that life-courses (or trajectories of young persons in transition) are strongly impacted by different macro-structural features. In this section, I am going to describe how social policies and educational policies can be considered as life-course policies. In a systematic manner, the impact of state action on the structure of individual life-courses will be assessed. In doing so, I describe not only the impact on the life-course as an institutionalized program of sequences and positions through time but also the impact of specific policies on the subjective constructions thus, the biographical action orientations of individuals. In a minimal definition, the life-course can be defined as a “pattern of socially defined, age-graded events and roles” (Elder 1999: 302). Such a minimal definition highlights the temporal structure of specific transitions, e.g. of family, education, and employment. Furthermore, the life-course can be seen as an institution that does not only denominate a program “regulat(ing) one’s movement through life both in terms of a sequence of positions” (Kohli 2007: 254), but also endorses a whole set of institutional scripts, a “set of biographical orientations by which to organize one’s experiences and plans” (ibid.) The latter definition highlights the fact that the life-course is a specific institution of modernity associated with the replacement of traditional social ties (in which employment transitions, family decisions and the integration in the economic sphere happened, as matter of course, without reference to the individual), towards the emergence of life-courses as a distinct level of regulation and of integration of the individual in functionally differentiated societies. The institutionalization of the life-course as defined by Martin Kohli (2007) describes more than the guarantee of a continual life-span and a sequential and chronological ordering of specific life events. Muchmore, it consists also in a shift towards a conception of the self that is structured around one’s own biography. The emergence of the life-course is thus closely linked to the emergence of “modern” individuality. In a very general manner, functionally differentiated, modern societies do not rely on traditional (e.g. family) ties for the inclusion of persons into functional systems of society (Luhmann 1990:

207). The inclusion into the different functional systems of society does not operate through a life-long social position *qua* birth, but through a “life-course” which encompasses the inclusion and exclusion into the different functional systems and entails different membership affiliations and positions. According to Luhmann, “careers” emerge from the structural inevitability that birth, primary family socialization, and social class do not suffice to create continuity of an individual’s life. The change from a stratified to a functionally differentiated society leads to a succession of selective events that combine self-selection (through biographical choice) and external selection (by different social systems each operating with an own functional rationality, the logic of profit-making in the economic sphere, the logic of representation in the political sphere, etc. (see Luhmann 2012: 99 ff). While in premodern societies,

“inclusion was regulated by social origins and therefore mediated by the family, affiliation, or similarly structured contexts, (in the) the functionally differentiated society, participation in communication is no longer adapted to the social hierarchy, [...] Rather, it is left to the individual’s decisions, as everyone has access to all subsystems of society in a non-predetermined way. Forms and criteria for this access are now attributed to each subsystem and to career” (Baraldi/Corsi 2017: 68).

As Leisering puts it, “The functional systems need persons to operate. To secure [...] the participation of individuals in the spheres, a separate symbolic entity distinct from the functional rationalities is needed, the self. The self and its developmental form, the life course, thus frame the participation of individuals in functional spheres” (Leisering 2003: 209). The emergence of “selves” – that is persons that conceive their life as a life in their own making is in this perspective an outcome of structural needs of modernization and the capitalist organization of society. This argument has also been brought forward by Martin Kohli (1986). Kohli shows that that historically, the institutionalization of the modern life-course is organized around wage-labor that emerged during the expansionary phase of capitalism and the western welfare state. To put it simply, Kohli’s institutionalization thesis posits a tri-partitioning of the life-course into a learning/training phase, an employment/family-phase and a retirement phase (Kohli 1985) that are linked through status-passages. He thus sees the social organization of labor as the prime determinant of the structure of life courses in modern societies. The order of these sequences and events can largely be interpreted a result of welfare state regulations (Mayer and Müller 1989, Leisering 2003), which contribute to the constitution of the different life-phases and the chronologisation of life through the definition of age-graded events, age norms, and deadlines, but also through the age-relative access to specific benefits, welfare rights and legal duties. welfare policies contribute to the process of institutionalizing the modern “biographical” individual: In those

cases in which the welfare state conceives individuals and not families as the receivers of specific benefits, it contributes to the detachment of life-courses from collective familial forms of life. The process of individualization has been fueled by the expansion of social security systems that softened the necessity to rely on intra-familial ties of solidarity. The state legislates entry and exit into employment, defines entry and exit from wage-labor in case of illness and invalidity, and defines the duration and entry requirements for specific educational pathways. These legal regulations give the life-course a specific chronological order and institutionalize specific behavioral expectations, thus giving a sense of security and routine through individual scripts for biographical “planning”, unburdening the individual from contingencies of life. These patterns (for instance collective transition of a cohort in an educational system, or the retirement age regulations) become a “self-evident frame of reference or “horizon” for orientation and planning of one’s life” (Kohli 2007: 258).

Leisering (2003) identifies three modes of operation and three core fields of the welfare state in shaping the life-course: The three core fields include education, old-age pensions, and systems of risk management. The three modes of operation that cut across the three fields are structuration/differentiation, integration, and normative modeling. Leisering describes that “education and old-age pensions contribute to the social definition of childhood, youth and old age, thereby structuring or differentiating the life course with the three standard phases of youth, adulthood and old age” (Leisering 2003: 214). This structuration/differentiation – so the argument goes – does not simply lead to different life-phases, but also creates specific status-positions and roles such as ‘schoolchildren’, ‘students’ and ‘old-age pensioners’, that define social identities and “membership of a “welfare class” (ibid.). This aspect of structuration/differentiation is of high importance if we want to understand the emergence of youth as a specific life-course phase. According to this perspective, the youth phase is an outcome of separating a specific age-group from the economic sphere, the creation of a so-called “educational moratorium” (Zinnecker 2003, Reynaert/Roose 2014), exempted from wage labor in order to ensure better preparation for the working phase. As Leisering puts it “The nation-state of the 19th and 20th centuries with its industrial economy and political democracy was interested in the quality, not only the quantity, of its workforce for economic as well as military purposes [...] Unproductive child labor was barred from the labor market and public education installed instead” (Leisering 2003: 208). Similarly, Meyer and Schöpflin (1989: 198) posit that “the introduction of compulsory schooling and optional further education is the most telling instance of state construction of the life course in its role in reacting to latent consequences of institutional differentiation” (ibid.). For these authors, the emergence of the youth phase cannot simply be attributed to a changing demand in qualified workforce requiring a longer training and education period, but as an intervention to “to make up for the weakened abil-

ity of families to socialize, train, and control children" (*ibid.*), particularly in early industrialization period, in which mothers were bound to work, while children were excluded from work. Citing studies of socio-historians, Mayer and Schöpflin demonstrate that "for the American case the introduction of education was highly contingent on the demand for labor and problems of controlling idle youth" (Mayer/Schöpflin 1986: 198), rather than primarily motivated as a period of preparation for work. The historical case is, however very different for dual-educational systems like Switzerland or Germany, where the so-called dual apprenticeship system is an outcome of a corporatist system of "occupations" going back to the middle ages, paired with a three-tiered school system as a functional equivalent (Busemeyer et al 2010), whose development goes back to the early 20th century and constitutes a remnant of a class-stratification based system of attribution to social positions. Nonetheless, the emergence of childhood and youth as a life-course phase is defined by various age norms, especially by the legal age of school entry, the minimum number of years of school attendance, the upper age limit for the prohibition of child work, and the age of majority. Mierendorff (2010: 153) has shown that the welfare state "regulates" childhood (the same applies for youth) through institutionalizing an age-hierarchy, through scolarisation, familiarization, and commodification. Bourdieu's famous dictum "youth is nothing but a word" (Bourdieu 1984) suggesting that the idea of youth as a unitary social category is above all a social construction that hides considerable variance according to class lines is emblematic for this position. Youth is a social category, framed by institutions, especially education, the labor market and the family, and different social practices, such as getting educated, leaving home, finding a job and forming a family (Fornäs 1995: 3). Historical research on childhood and youth has shown in many ways that the legal age requirements for accessing adult privileges, the separation between adulthood, youth and childhood is an issue of social conventions and contingent upon specific socio-historical developments (see e.g. Ariès 1962) which cannot be separated from other social institutions like the family, the state or the development of an industrialized economy. The social institution of childhood can be seen as an installation of a "separate world for children" (Reynaert/Bouverne de Bie/Vandervelde 2008), the historical "detachment" of children and youth from the sphere of production and from the adult world leads to the youth moratorium as a separate space and to a "pedagogical" conception of childhood and youth, which serves as a period of preparation for adulthood. The compartmentalization of the modern life-course in different age-groups or the installation of child protection legislation bear witness of this process of constructing a "youth land" (*ibid.*), of a separated spatio-temporal moratorium. The conception of childhood and youth as a moratorium politically positions children and youth in a "pre-citizenship" space (Moran-Ellis 2010: 186).

The second mode of regulation of the life-course cited by Leisering is "integration" and "normative modeling" (Leisering 2003: 214). Integration delineates the role

of social policy systems to establish connections between different phases of life, or for instance of educational system propensity to enhance life chances in adulthood. More particularly, systems of risk management such as unemployment insurance, accident insurance, health insurance/services, social assistance, and personal social services, like therapy and counseling, often operate as “bridging devices” for life-course discontinuities and transitions at different stages. “Normative modeling” describes the “hidden or implicit social policy agenda geared to shaping the life course according to normative models relating to class, gender, and ethnicity” (Leisering 2003: 211). Leisering explicitly cites the function of the “hidden curriculum” in school, but he also describes the implicit gender-roles inherent the male breadwinner model on which employment insurance, taxation system, and pension system is based on. The normative modeling of the life-course is also inherent in the behavioral expectations of institutions, for instance in school, and thus contributes to enforcing specific forms of life-conduct. Pupils - or at least their parents - know that a good grade during the last obligatory school year will affect a pupil’s potential professional career. Normative modeling thus exerts a function of behavioral control, directly feeding in the propensity of students to align their behavior to the role expectations of their position. Furthermore, normative modeling also happens through the “hidden” regulation of the possibilities to gain a satisfying self-image, as a more or less informal mode of social control, operating through shame, moral blame or through ascribing identities: “The stigma attached to the least respectable tiers of risk management, social assistance, further underpins the normalcy of seeking one’s welfare in the market” (Leisering 2003: 212). At the same time, normative modeling gains effectiveness through the “impact of social legislation which itself becomes entrenched in everyday culture and attitudes of Individuals” (Leisering 2003: 213). It stabilizes expectations of individuals when transitioning from one status to another or when it comes to stabilizing specific security expectations of individuals. The welfare state thus has a fair share for the instauration of the modern youth phase. Specific entitlements and the participation in specific institutionalized spaces are structured at least as much around age-groups then around need-definitions. Age groups, such as childhood and youth are defined by welfare law and administration entailing a whole array of definitions of social problems, specific professional fields of expertise and specific institutions. This is also represented in the fact that many features of social and educational policies are age-group policies that are inscribed within welfare law and administration and that systematically differ across countries (see e.g. Jones 2008).



### 3.1. The Life-Course as an Institutional Program and a Subjective Construction

As has been shown, the life-course as an institutionalized pattern of participation in different functional systems of society according to different life-phases, conditioned by objective features of the welfare state. However, life-courses are not only “institutionalized” within the macro-structural features of a society. The individual life course has not to be conceptualized as a behavioral outcome of macro-social organizations (or of its interaction with psychological properties of the individual) but as the result of “the subject’s constructive activity in dealing with the available life course programs” (Kohli 1986: 272). The shaping of the life course does not only happen on the level of the “movement through life in terms of sequences and positions”, but also through shaping the “biographical perspectives and actions” (Kohli 2007: 255–256). Accordingly, the life-course unfolds itself as an “institutional pattern that shapes lives both in terms of movement through positions and of biographical perspectives and plans.” (Kohli 2007: 254). The partitioning and sequencing of life-time into different patterns does not only happen at a level outside of the person, conditioned by macro-structures, but also takes place on the level of “cultural patterns of meaning and corresponding subjective biographical perspectives” (Kohli 1985: 21). This gets clearer if we consider that the temporally embedded participation within the different functional systems of society can be considered as a “loose coupling” (Elder 1994) of individual life-conduct, activities of life-planning with socially constituted guidelines and demands. Different social systems require certain action pre-dispositions and subjectivities in order to become a member of a particular functional system (see e.g. Bommers/Scherr 2000). In our case, where the secondary educational system is organized as an “apprenticeship” market, these requirements consists in understanding oneself in a certain way (as a “worker” or laborer” who offers his labor power to firms and employers) with certain predispositions (the right “work-ethic”, punctuality, that is certain behavioral dispositions) and possess adequate (or at least sufficient institutionally recognized) educational certificates. The participation in the field of upper secondary education involves also more “private” attributes: In order to be selected by employers – in a life-course language, to pass the “gates” from school to work, one has to have the right educational aspirations, be able to display one’s own motivations, and to describe one’s own educational choice as deriving from one’s own actions and plans (rather than as a default choice). The demands pointed towards the individual are therefore considerable, as it is his duty – at the risk of dropping out of the institutionalized life-course programs – to comply with and to implement the normality patterns and rationalities of the different subsystems within his own actions.

### 3.1.1. Life-course, Biography and Institutionalized Individualism

Meyer (2005) establishes a connection between the emergence of the life-course as a modern institution and the institutions of the welfare state and education systems, which are seen as “major factors” for a “pronounced legitimation and organization of the subjective perspective of the individual” (Meyer 2005: 5). According to Meyer, this is demonstrated through the fact that those institutions “associated with the liberal model of the active, autonomous, choosing individual gain special strength, while those associated with the individual as protected welfare beneficiary of strong corporate or collective processes lose relative strength” (Meyer 2005: 10). Similarly, Mayer and Schöpflin associate the social and legal construction of the individual with the construction of a modern state: “modern-state formation [...] successively created conditions that single out the individual both as the object of state activity and as a distinctive, self-reliant actor. In destroying and weakening traditional associations and communal powers, and by centralizing authority, individuals begin to distinguish themselves from their collectivities. Rights and duties are transferred from collective bodies to the individual” (Mayer 1989: 193). The modern self as an “authorized actor of modernity” (Meyer 2004) is bound to the structural needs of the make-up of functionally differentiated societies. While in traditional societies, the link between the individual and society operated quasi naturally, as the individual was embedded within traditional ties, in contrast, the integration of the individual within the different functional systems in modern, functionally differentiated societies entails the autonomisation and operational closing of subsystems in a society which develops organizations with formal membership definitions (Luhmann 2012: 270). Each of these societal subsystems thus has its own membership definitions, their own logic or rationality, according to which persons are required to operate. This functional differentiation leads to the development of a modern self: “the participation of individuals in these spheres, a separate symbolic entity distinct from the functional rationalities is needed, the self. The self and its developmental form, the life course, thus frame the participation of individuals in functional spheres” (Leisering 2006: 209). The institution of the life-course, and the self, infused with the idea of individual authorship of its biography is thus the outcome of a process in which persons are meant to operate the participation in different “interaction fields” (Levy 1996).

For the aim of this chapter, it is important to show that the changes described above do not signify a decrease in social control and augmentation of individual autonomy per-se. This is also highlighted by John W. Meyer, who – in a neo-institutionalist perspective interprets the rise of modern individuality as the institutionalization of an “authorized agent of modernity” constructed by “the modern cultural system” (ibid. 2010). According to Meyer 2010 and Meyer and Jepperson (2010), the emergence of a “modern actor” is thus not necessarily connected with increased

control over one's own life-course but reflects systemic requirements of modern societies. If seen as the "institutionalisation" of the actor of modernity, individualization does not signify a decrease in social control over the life course, but points to other forms of (increased) regulation and control. While on the one side, "the perspective of the individual, in one form or another, is increasingly celebrated" (Meyer 2005: 9), and "reinforce(s) the legitimacy of the individual's perspective as a project" (ibid.) social control increasingly reaches down to "reflect, affect and incorporate" (Meyer 2005: 10) individual persons<sup>1</sup>. This is highly important when it comes to the role of biographical self-descriptions of actors, having to refer to the institution of the "self" when giving an account of their actions, plans, and choices. As Meyer (2005) describes, with the institutionalization of the authorized actor of modernity, "life course choices (and all sorts of opinions) are to be made and justified responsibly, with reasonable arguments respecting the individual's own personhood as well as that of others. The individual is to be a coherent person over time, with calculated relations to a past and a future: the life course, and attention to it as a project are increasing requirements" (Meyer 2005: 21). The installation of an actor of modernity thus burdens the individual, loosened from traditional ties to justify its choices with reference to one's own personality, one's own individuality. This does not contradict the general idea that the process of individualization has loosened (at least partially) traditional ties and enlarged the range of possibilities (albeit the notion of "beyond status and class" (Beck/Beck-Gernsheim 2001) may be too optimistic). But the social control that is exerted on the individual life-course is considerable, through the "range of plausible motives, perspectives, and considerations" which "greatly constrains choices" (Meyer 2005). With Mills one could talk about social control exerted through certain institutionally situated acceptable "vocabularies of motives" (Mills 1940), which serve to line up individual conduct with institutional requirements.

### 3.1.2. From Positions and Sequences to Identities over Time

At this point, it is important to distinguish between the concept of life-course and the notion of biography. While the life-course defines the "objective" movement through time and space, focusing on the sequences and positions occupied in the social space during one's life, measured by statistical categories, "biography" delineates the "subjective trajectory", (Dubar 1998), that is the interpretation of this

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1 Meyers idea of a „institutionalisation of the individual actor“ thus has some similarities with Norbert Elias description of the process of civilization, described as a displacement of control from external arrangements into the individual and with Foucault's writings on the modern disciplinary power, working not against the "freedom" of the individual, but governing through freedom (see the next chapter for a thorough discussion).

trajectory by the person. Particularly in Germany, the strand of biographical research has been a booming branch in sociology and educational sciences since the 1990s. A central point of contention in biographical approaches is the relationship between life-course and biography. While all biographical approaches focus on the subjective meaning-making of actors, they differ in their conceptualization between the two. In system-theoretical approaches, biography is seen as an autopoietic process in which individuals self-referentially produce identities that allow for maintenance of self-description (Schimank 1988), a process that dramatically increases within functionally differentiated societies. Fischer-Rosenthal (1995) puts much more emphasis on the reconstruction of the interaction between objective life-course structures, their experience by actors, and their configuration in specific biographical constructions. More particularly, Fritz Schütze developed a biographical research tradition based on concepts from the Chicago school of sociology (Strauss 1985, Corbin/Strauss 1988). The concepts of “biographical work” and of “trajectories” both go back to this tradition. Schütze (see for instance Schütze 1982 for a seminal text in German; Schütze 2008 for a comprehensive introduction in English), posits a relationship between the identity development of an individual and her or his narrative renderings of life historical experiences. As such, the former become analyzable through the latter. According to Schütze, narrative accounts can be analyzed according to their formal structures and textual expressions and give insights into basic social processes. The distinction, already made at the beginning of this chapter between the life-course as a “pattern of socially defined, age-graded events and roles” (Elder, 1999: 302) and the subjective construction of one’s own life (“biography”) (see Kohli 1985) is of crucial importance as it allows to theoretically conceive structure and agency within individual life-courses (see. e.g. Heinz 2009). One cannot reasonably expect that individuals smoothly adopt or interiorize institutionalized temporal patterns, neither can we expect that the strictly regulated entry and exit patterns happen without any frictions. The proposition to analyze the life-course both as an “institutional program and a subjective construction” (Kohli 1985: 20) urges us to analyze the tensions between the objective life-course (as pre-ordered reality) and of biography (as the identity over time of the person that “travels” through the different sequences and positions). Neither do life-course and biography coincide, nor does a biography, as a life-course “planning activity” prime over the objective course of events over one’s life. It is only the conjunct analysis of these two elements that allow analyzing the interplay between agency and structure. Just like Kohli, Dubar (1998) argues in an influential article of french life-course sociology that the analysis of social trajectories is confronted with the question of the “articulation” between two aspects of the life-course. On the one side, the “objective trajectory”, defined as a sequence of positions occupied during the course of lives, measured by statistical categories of sequences and positions, and on the other side, the “subjective trajectory”, that expresses oneself in

biographical narratives, through the means of “indigenous categories” of different social worlds and that condenses in different heterogeneous “identity forms” (Dubar 1998: 73). For Dubar, the confrontation between these two analyses is particularly important in order to grasp social identities both as individual and institutional processes. Dubar gives the example of unemployment and “insertion difficulties”, of abrupt status changes or of the subjective dealing with being made “superfluous” due to fast social and economic change. Citing his own research, Dubar describes that “in nearly all the cases, the question of identity is posed because the categories by which people defined themselves or through which other persons defined them are becoming “illegitimate” or “impossible to maintain” (Dubar/Demazière 2001). Sometimes because these categories did not exist anymore, often because there exists a gap between the categories that were a resource for a self-definition and the categories used by others for defining a person. Dubar’s notion of “identity forms” (Dubar 1992, 1998) designates exactly this articulation between “the “biographical” (through which the self-identity, claimed by individuals) and the “structural” (through which identities that are socially legitimized, in a specific moment in time are recognized in time). This “identity construction” constitutes a joint process of individuals and institutions in the social construction of categories.

As Delory-Momberger puts it, “Biography is not the factual development of a life, but the whole set of representations with which individuals make sense of their life in continually constructing the form and the meaning – the process through which they produce, for themselves as for others the manifestations of their existence” (Delory-Momberger, 2004: 20 own translation). Biographies, as “narrated”, communicated experience is the main medium through which individuals “structure their experience”, (see e.g. Brunner 1984). The concept of “biographicity” (Alheit/Dausien 2000, Marotzki 2007) defines the continual re-interpretation of new lived experience from the background of an individual’s biographical stock of knowledge, trying to bring it in accordance with what they have experienced until now. As Marotzki states, biographicity points towards the process of a “retrospective reflection in which through biographical work, we try to link different (sometimes contradictory) experiences and events in order to yarn a consistent thread towards our life” (Marotzki 2006: 61). According to Alheit/Dausien (2000), it is via this active process of continual reinterpretation, that we are able to perceive our life as “mouldable” (ibid), respectively try to give direction to our lives. Biography can then be seen as a “type of self-reflection and self-description that uses temporal distinctions, and thus can structure the life-time of individuals and define temporally differing engagements and participation in institutions” (Fischer-Rosenthal 2000). This means that the “loose coupling” (Elder 1994) of individual life-conduct with the “systemic requirements of modern existence is operated through their biographical self-descriptions” which is a way to orient the individual “and make him or her reliable for institutions in a historical social situation when static

personal definitions quasi-natural phases of a life-cycle are not sufficient for this purpose" (Fischer-Rosenthal 2000: 117).

### 3.1.3. Rationalization, Normalization and Social Control of the Life-Course: Temporal Patterns and the "Autonomous" Individual

The emergence of a modern life-course and the development of a "modern" biographical actor whose life-course is structured from the perspective of the individual could wrongly be associated with increasing individual autonomy and a weakening of social control. In a more convincing interpretation that often recurs to Michel Foucault's thoughts, the process of individualization corresponds to a transition from external control to "self" control, thus to a different, but nonetheless strong forms of social control. The weakening of traditional social ties and the introduction of the individual life-course – both as an institutional program and a subjective construction – allows for new forms of individuality, but there is also a functional need for more individuality. Results of action, as well as whole life-course trajectories, are increasingly attributed to the individual. The modern life-course comes as a cultural model of self-management as an individual project. In addition to this emergence of the "self" as a mode of accounting, the institutionalization of the life-course is also a mode of socialization, of "*Vergesellschaftung*" (Kohli 1985), of "structural patterns" that regulate individual conduct and serve as a template, a guideline and a requirement for individual life-courses. The task of dealing with the existing life-course programs is – in the wake of the emergence of the modern life-course – left largely to the individual. The task to "articulate" objective entry and exit-patterns, institutionally regulated transitions, and contingencies of modern societies with individual biographical planning activities, the temporal articulation of the "structural" with the "individual" is left to the subject.

This is strongly relates to the institutionalized patterns of the life course. As Fischer-Rosenthal describes, "with the increasing complexity of social activities to be coordinated and the multiplication of institutions with their own rhythms and their need for co-operation, a complex time-pattern is produced and forced upon everyone" (Fischer-Rosenthal 2000: 115). The complex interdependency of an individual's life-courses and institutions ask from individuals a "biographical far-sightedness" (Leisering 2004). Other authors have described individualization as a process of "civilization", in the Eliasian sense in which "the replacement of control from organizational settings towards the interiority of the person" (Oriane 2005) takes place. Elias describes that the process of civilization "attaches great importance to the development of a methodical, disciplined temporal habitus as being one of the most significant elements in the not overly restrictive but nevertheless continual self-control to which civilized man acquiesces" (Tabboni 2001: 5). Concretely, this amounts to an instrumental, reflexive orientation towards one's

own life-course, and a specific relation to biographical time, in which the present is used in an instrumental manner towards “becoming” in the future through the repression of immediate, hedonist impulses. As Leccardi writes,

“the biographical perspective [...] involves the presence of an extended temporal horizon, a strong capacity for self-control, conduction of life in which programming time is crucial – traits which, taken together, identify the modern conception of individuality” (Leccardi 2008: 120)

The very importance of this temporal orientations, and more importantly, of delayed gratification can be seen in children’s socialization: “the links among children’s momentary selves are bunched pretty tightly around the present self, with essentially no connection to distant ones in either direction. Socialization, particularly of children of children, endeavors to mold selves into a network that is stretched more smoothly across time, and usually in one direction more than the other” (Gould 2003: 176). A central dimension of this temporal pattern is the conception of youth as a “moratorium”, which is traditionally characterized by freedom from responsibility for one’s future, oriented towards activities centered around the present, and which become stretched to longer temporal horizons during the late youth phase and early adulthood. The role of institutions and organizations is considerable: As Gould puts it: “laws oblige people to attend school, buy liability insurance, wear seatbelts, and don motorcycle helmets — all to counteract the tendency to care more about one’s present self than the well-being of future selves or that of anyone else” (Gould 2003: 176-177). Organizations operating social control are particularly concerned with the inscription of persons within the time patterns of the institutionalized life-course – disregard for future selves – and an excessive orientation towards the present is a central problem description, especially in the field of youth welfare. The requirements of a modern life-course do not only characterize the temporalized, diachronic dimension but can be described as a general rationalization of life-conduct. As Gottschall and Voss (2005: 11, own translation) describe, “problem-treating institutions require compatibility between the patterns of life-conduct of involved persons with their own requirements” (ibid: 11). Due to its characteristics, the arrangement of life-conduct is exactly at the junction between the individual and society, in which societal developments (e.g. the “subjectivation” of work as increased demand for self-control) translate into specific demands for the organization of everyday life. Social Work, in acting on this individual life-conduct” mainly in a regulatory manner, can thus be seen as a translation device between the person and societal demands.

### 3.1.4. The Paradoxes of Individualization and the Politics of the Individual

The emergence of the idea of a biography is strongly linked to the development of “modern societies”, or the entrance of societies in a “second modernity” (Beck/Bonss 2003) in which the intensification of “individualization” (Beck/Beck-Gernsheim 2001), and erosion of legitimacy of formerly valid collective patterns of orientation liberates the individual from traditional ties and allows a stronger self-awareness of a possible mastery of his life. The notion of second modernity delineates amongst others that central principles of the “first modernity” (like equality and freedom) are “universalized” (Beck/Bonss 2003), which means that they increasingly enter into the action horizons of actors. According to theories of the institutionalization of the modern life-course, this has a central impact on the ways in which modern individuals conceive their biographical plans and actions: “life-courses are culturally interpreted as the result of an individual biographical project” (Levy 2004). The cultural mode in which the possibility to attribute results of biographical actions as outcomes of societal barriers and selection mechanisms is replaced by an individualized model of biographical self-management as a “reflexive self-project” (Giddens 1991: 32) for which the individual is responsible. Life-planning and self-management become central notions. It is important to highlight the fact that the idea of individual reflexivity embedded in the notion of “reflexive modernity” (Beck/Beck-Gernsheim 2002) does not signify a *de facto* “increase of mastery and consciousness, but a heightened awareness that mastery is impossible” (Latour, 2003, cited in Beck et al. 2003). This dimension is also highlighted by Zygmunt Bauman, pointing to the fact that individualization “consists in transforming human ‘identity’ from a ‘given’ into a ‘task’ – and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance. In other words, it consists of establishing a ‘de jure’ autonomy (though not necessarily a *de facto* one)” (Baumann 2001: 69). In the process of individualization, “predestination” was replaced with “life-project” (Baumann 2001, *ibid.*). While some theorists of individualisation link the development of second modernity to an increase of reflexivity, and thus a potential for emancipation, Others view this process more critically. Foucault’s work can be read as an attempt to show that individuals as subjects are produced through procedures that are different but in no way less coercive than the more collectivized routines of the previous era. Critical theorists describe the process of individualization as a paradoxical one, in which formerly emancipatory claims of self-realization and individualization are transformed into a systemic prerequisite of individual performance: “processes which once promised an increase of qualitative freedom are henceforth altered into an ideology of de-institutionalization, is the emergence in individuals of a number of symptoms of inner emptiness, of feeling oneself be superfluous, and of absence of purpose” (Honneth 2004:



463). This, in turn, produces rising levels of mental and psycho-social suffering, resulting from the “Weariness of the self” (Ehrenberg, 1999). The discussion on the possibilities of reflexivity has had an important impact on the discussion in youth studies. Some authors emphasize the increased possibility of “choice biographies” (du Bois Reymond 1998), others point to the ambivalences of the uncritical reception of Beck’s theory of modernization in youth studies, which would amount to a “pervasive theoretical orthodoxy” (Brannen/Nilsen 2007), not considering the restraining factors of agency and dismissing how structural factors still define the biographies of young persons (e.g. Farrugia 2013, Furlong/Cartmel 2007). Woodman describes that Ullrich Beck himself opted for a more balanced view and the notion of “choice biography” and argues that the idea of increased mastery of one’s life resulting from a process of reflexive modernization is a misreading of Beck’s theory (Woodman 2009: 246). Often drawing on more structuralist conceptualizations, these critics invoke Bourdieu’s theory of habitualised dispositions to describe the impact of structural features on biographies of youngsters – in some cases claiming a “middle ground” between “Beck” and Bourdieu” through introducing concepts like “bounded agency” (Evans 2002). As Farrugia describes, while “Beck does not celebrate the kind of autonomous agency that his critics accuse him of, he nevertheless does not have the theoretical armory to properly respond to their critiques” (Farrugia 2013: 276). Woodman argues that the question at stake is about structure and agency and the appropriate tools for conceptualizing it. For instance, Furlong and colleagues identify a “tendency to exaggerate processes of de-linearization and that the modern tendency to regard transitional complexity as symptomatic of choice biographies can help mask structures of disadvantage” (Furlong/Cartmel/Biggart 2006: 22). In an earlier paper, Furlong and Cartmel have contested Beck’s account of individualization and hold that the “the fact that people feel that they act autonomously and independently over their own biographies is not necessarily at odds with the view that much of the biography continues to be structured and determined by external factors” (ibid.: 1997: 37). In this perspective, the change would be a semantic one, insofar as biographies would be interpreted as “individual self-projects” (Giddens 1997) by the subjects themselves. This view is congruent with a conception of Agency as a cultural mode of accountability and the emergence of a “culture” of individualism in which people hold each other responsible through the “institution of responsible action”. (Meyer 2005, Meyer/Jepperson 2000). Meyer and Jepperson analyze Agency in a neo-institutional perspective, starting from the idea that “the modern actor is a historical and ongoing cultural construction” (Meyer/Jepperson 2000: 102). The emergence of “modern actorhood” is based on the emergence of cultural accounts that allow for the attribution of agency to specific institutions (amongst others, the individual self). According to these authors, the emergence of an authorized actor of modernity is based on a historical, “ongoing relocation into a society of agency

originally located in transcendental authority or in natural forces environing the social system [...] Over time these exogenous forces (e.g. godly powers) have been relocated as authority immanent within society itself, enlarging social agency, relocating authority from god to church, from church to state, from church and state to individual souls and later citizens" (Meyer/Jepperson 2000: 100). Their theoretical account of agency links the "modern actor of modernity" to a modern liberal model of sociopolitical organization, whose specific organization (a democratic-capitalist society) requires, legitimizes and constructs actorhood. Agency becomes a feature that is amongst others constructed by economic institutions that require "the individual as a competent and empowered choice- and decision-maker, since the capacity for choice is crucial to the legitimation of markets" (Meyer 2005: 4). Meyer and Jepperson's (2000) and Meyer's (2005) account of Agency is not only relevant because it adds a critical reading of theories of reflexive modernization, but also because it builds on the institutionalization of the modern life-course and because it highlights the emergence of modern selfhood through professional consultants, therapists and psychologists: "modern individuals are well known for their rampant use of such informal and formal consultancy, helping to manage the mobilization of a proper self and its deployment over an (itself standardized) life course" (Jepperson/Meyer 2000: 105). The assumption and study of reflexive choice biographies, a central topic of contemporary research on youth transitions is thus the outcome of the institutionalization of a modern actor of modernity. In Meyer's perspective, the "expanded self-oriented articulated planning-like activities" (Meyer 2005: 15) are a result of the institutionalization of modern actorhood: "The lives of the young people are discussable in universalistic terms. The young people themselves can discuss them. And they can properly be discussed by these young people in terms of their own desires, plans, intentions, and choices" (Meyer 2005: 17). While the fact that life-course choices have increasingly to be justified with reference to modern individuality, thus own desires, aspirations, and wishes, this does not necessarily entail more "freedom" or an enhanced choice:

"The individual, formally, chooses educational roles to an increased degree, and subsequently may have something like enhanced choice of occupational positions, but it all occurs under regulation. Certain jobs are inappropriate for persons with certain educational levels and lie outside the choice process. So, more and more choice may be created, but more and more social regulation arises over the choices" (Meyer 2005: 17).

It is the concept of an "institutionalized actor of modernity", that allows them to reflect self-awarely on their own trajectory. This perspective is consistent with important research in the field of sociology of youth and more particularly, studies that shed light on the role of class, gender and race and their (ongoing) relevance for youth transitions and educational choices. Vincent Ball paraphrases the no-

tion of “reflexive modernity” as a “theory according to which persons [...] see their decision-making as individual ‘choice’ rather than the product of structured constraints” (Ball et al. 2000: 2). Nevertheless, the fact that people use a grammar of choice and of a trajectory as an individual self-project does not imply their trajectories being characterized by more options and choices. Similarly, Heinz (2009) finds that young persons from various backgrounds pursue individual goals when choosing pathways, but, states that in the downside “against an emphatic reading of the individualization thesis [...] only socially privileged and educationally successful youths succeed in transforming their agency into self-reflexive projects” (Heinz 2009: 391). And in fact, the claim often associated with Beck’s individualization thesis, that transitions and life-courses become more and more de-standardized seems to be refuted by longitudinal research (Brückner/Mayer 2005). Based on a comparison of the cohorts born between 1921 and 1971, these authors claim strong stability of the institutional environment that structure the school to work transition, while only the family formation nexus shows a stronger tendency to de-standardization.

The theory of individualization, stating that a growing de-traditionalisation and a decline of taken-for-granted models of identity lead per se to an increase in reflexivity and the emergence of choice Biographies<sup>2</sup> has thus to be assessed critically. The critique of both Beck’s and Giddens claims have been abundant and is fueled both by controversies on the remaining salience of classic socioeconomic markers like class (who, in a famous quote by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, allegedly have become “zombie categories” (Beck/Beck-Gernsheim 2001: 203). Many writers have challenged Beck’s and Giddens claims, often on the grounds of detailed empirical descriptions of the strong and continuing relationship between parental cultural capital and young people’s identities. Ball et. al. (2002) show that student’s choices of higher education institutions are infused “with class and ethnic meanings” (ibid: 51) and that the very idea of choice “assumes a kind of formal equality that obscures the effects of real inequalities” (ibid.). Results from MacDonald and Marsh (2005) further support a critical stance towards the theory of reflexive modernization. While their study confirms that “the diverse, individualized identities

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2 It is crucial to point to the fact that Giddens “Modernity and self-identity” (1991) is much more enthusiast about the reflexive forging of self-identity against traditional ties than Beck. As Farrugia (2013) states, “This argument has been critiqued by a number of authors (including Beck, 1994) for its uncritical optimism and view of reflexivity as a cognitive rationality and sovereign agency” (Farrugia 2013: 285). Beck, in turn attributes de-traditionalisation to changes in material structures and as an outcome of the change of material structures (from coherent systems to structural fragmentation, linked to post fordist labor conditions and globalised economies) that lead to the requirement of individuals to be “reflexive” in order to negotiate existing structures, and to create a coherent biography in a fractured world.

and transitional pathways [...] mapped out are definitely riskier, fluid and unpredictable than in previous periods" (MacDonald/Marsh 2005: 210), and that "interviewees certainly engaged in reflexive consideration of their lives" (ibid.), they also firmly reject the idea that individuals "conceiving of himself or herself as the center of action, as the planning office with respect to his/her own biography" (Beck, 1992: 135). Much more, and particularly for the disadvantaged subpopulation analyzed by the authors, lack of planning – what Evans and Heinz (1994) call "passive individualization [...] was the definitive feature of the majority of the school-to-work, family and housing careers described in this book" (ibid.). The suggestion implicitly attributed to Beck's theory of reflexive modernization, and even more to Giddens theory of reflexive modernization, that social conditioning and the intergenerational transmission of cultural capital no longer operates or shapes identity, has to be assessed highly critically. As Evans and Furlong (1997) highlight "The fact that people feel that they act autonomously and independently over their own biographies is not necessarily at odds with the view that much of the biography continues to be structured and determined by external factors" (ibid: 51).

There is a much more disquieting interpretation of the emergence of individualization, which comes closer to a diagnostic of contemporary society than a stand-alone piece of research that analyses self-interpretation pattern of a group of young people. Such an interpretation is provided by Axel Honneth, describing that claims for individual self-realization that so rapidly multiplied in western societies in the 30-40 years ago, "have become so much a feature of the institutionalized expectations inherent in social reproduction that the particular goals of such claims are lost and they are transmuted into a support of the system's legitimacy" (Honneth 2004: 468). Individualization, once strongly linked to an emancipatory project, has become a "systemic prerequisite" (ibid.), and the "ideal of self-realization's inversion into an external compulsion" (Honneth 2004: 457). This produces – through the imperative of selfhood – rising levels of mental and psycho-social suffering (with concrete effects: see Ehrenberg, 1999). Beverley Skeggs (2004) provides an interesting reading of the individualization thesis, and links it to the enforcement of a conception of a self-governing (and self-possessing) individual, to which is attributed moral value, and which serves as an institutionalized symbolic marker for attributing moral value to particular practices of the self. Skeggs' research is of interest as it analyzes individualization and the corresponding cultural model of the self as a powerful, middle-class biased cultural norm. In her view, "those who cannot accrue value in themselves by dominant symbolic techniques are therefore always already read as immoral. Hence a refusal to play the game or the lack of knowledge to participate in middle-class taste culture is read back onto the working-class as an individualized moral fault, a pathology, a problem of bad-choice, bad culture, a failure to be enterprising or to be reflexive" (Skeggs 2004: 77). As such, Skeggs associates the emergence of the individualized self as a mode of pathologisation:

“people who do not display the requisite reflexivity are seen to be lacking, not fully formed selves, and this lack is moralized and individualized, a failure of the self to know its self, rather than being a lack of access to the techniques and knowledge required to enable the display of the reflexive self” (Skeggs, 2004: 148).

To the same amount that scholars in the sociology of youth are divided about the right model to conceptualize agency, the amount and latitude of the agency that can be attributed to an individual has serious implications for policy-making. If “life is largely what one makes of it” (Settersten/Gannon 2005: 36), the individual is responsible in case of failure. Models of agency thus have political implications. Commenting different models of agency in life-course theory, Settersten and Gannon describe that “While few of these latter models take the life course to be completely devoid of social obstacles and barriers, these models often downplay the effects of social forces and assume that good planning and hard work go a long way in overcoming barriers. In the political sphere, these models can be dangerous, at least if they are carried to an extreme because they blame people for negative outcomes and suggest that individuals need not be extended support from the state because their problems and circumstances are their own doing” (Settersten/Gannon 2005: 29). The discussion on agency within life-courses has a considerable political relevance, particularly when it comes to the welfare state and the motivations both professionals and beneficiaries of social programs possess. As Deacon states, “welfare policies necessarily rest upon assumptions about the motivations that people have and the capacities they possess” (Deacon 2004: 447). For instance, the introduction of quasi-markets in welfare provision is based on the conception of the “welfare-consumer” (Mann 2006) who chooses deliberately between different the offers of different service providers, and on a conception of welfare professionals as egoist “pawns” (Legrand 2003) which have to be presented the right policy incentives through quasi-market mechanisms in order to ensure sound service provision. On the other hand, conservative positions within the American welfare debates about the “new paternalism” (Mead 1997), in which it is assumed that recipients of welfare lack either the motivation or the ability to fulfill the common obligations of citizenship. All the same, conceptions of the “enabling” (Torfing 2005) or the “activating state” are acting on a subtler construction of welfare beneficiaries as potentially agentic rationally choosing beings that have to be provided with the “right incentives” and the right resources and opportunities for its expression. In such a perspective, “the task of public policy is to create it through a combination of compulsion and persuasion” (Deacon 2004: 448). It is important to point to the emphasis put on a policymaking paradigm that rests on an individual rational actor account of agency (Taylor-Gooby 2008), a fact that could also be shown in the chapter on the changing policy frames for youth transitions in Switzerland (Chapter 2).

### 3.2. The Organizational Regulation of Biographies

In the past chapter, it should have become clear that the “people changing institutions” (Hasenfeld 1973) analyzed in the empirical part of this research study have a functional partake within the life-course regime that the swiss transition system constitutes. Social policies and social work are “operating a re-inscription (and exclusion) of individual’s trajectories into institutional calendars” (Passeron 1990: 18, own translation). They purport, in a certain way, the normality patterns of the institutionalized life-course regime and translate them, sometimes enforce them into the life-world of the young persons. This transmission of normality patterns is effective within practices of institutional “guidance” and control. It can be observed within the interactions between experts and gatekeepers of institutions and individuals, as the respective ascriptions and categorizations constitute a prime source of information for the individual life-conduct. Organizations of the transition system “operate a translation of macro- and meso-structural features within the micro-sociological, especially life-course-related decisions of individuals within transitional phases” (Struck 2001: 29, own translation) Accordingly, the interaction between institutional processing logics (and their interdependence with different stakeholders from their organizational environment) and the individual biographies will be the focus of interest of this chapter. Andreas Walther states that the development of social work as a profession, and in its institutionalized form – as the development of specific social support systems have a “co-ruling” function in the life course regime (Walther 2011). Not only are its target groups constructed around the normal-biographical life-course, it also affirms a normalization function towards a “standard-biographical” life-course. In doing so, social work is not only structured around the life-course in terms of sequences and positions but also directly impacts on young people’s biographical projects and plans. This is also described by theories of human service organizations, highlighting the fact that they constitute “a set of institutionalized procedures aimed at changing the physical, psychological, social or cultural attributes of people in order to transform them from a given status to a new prescribed status” (Hasenfeld 1983: 111). The ways in which people are “changed” is thereby not contingent but reflects classifications and goal orientations from their environment. As they are “embedded in a broader institutional environment from which they derive their legitimacy, their license to work on people and their service technologies” (Garrow/Hasenfeld 2010: 33), their goals and modes of operation are dependent on external cultural resources of legitimation. Deviance from the normal life-course is codified into a need for intervention by professional experts and is brought to an institutionalized treatment. The regulation of the life-course does not only happen through the “macro-features” of different welfare state regimes, defining the sequences and positions of different life-course transitions, but it also operates on the level of a micro-political

regulation. As Leisering describes, the system of human service production plays a central role in the regulation of the life-course:

“people become clients of bureaucrats, social professionals, and experts such as doctors, psychologists, lawyers, and sociologists. Experts do not only provide services but redefine the identities and knowledge categories by which people perceive themselves and their situation” (Leisering 2003: 298).

In this perspective, the focus of analysis is necessarily the interaction between the patterns of people processing and the biographies of beneficiaries, through analyzing the transmission of normality patterns in processes of institutional regulation.

### 3.2.1. Human Service Organizations as Life-Course “Gate-Keepers”

Gate-keeping organizes careers and the life of an individual. Transitions between different life-course sequences are socially organized, and specific organizations (such as schools, government agencies, or specific human service organizations), organize access to different status passages and structure it according to specific criteria. The focus on “gate-keepers” constitutes a specific meso-perspective, which does not presuppose that macro features of the life-course (age-graded sequences of events) are unambiguously incorporated by agents for their individual life-planning. Much more, such an incorporation and transmission also depend on specific organizational activities. Gate-keeping can be described as a specific moment in which the macro and micro levels of the life-course are mediated. Behrens and Rabe-Kleberg (1993) point to the crucial role that gate-keepers play for the enforcement of age-norms and continuity expectations. These authors argue that a perspective focusing on gate-keepers and their activities allows overcoming the undue binary conception of age-norms as either homogenous institutional demands or as simple individual developmental needs. They propose that “biographical and age norms are not anchored in an ultra-stable form in the individual as needs, but have to be seen as demands and offers on the part of gate-keeping agents that are not harmonized among each other but have to make decisions with regard to distribution and selection” (Behrens/Rabe-Kleberg 1993: 241). Gate-keepers are, in such a perspective an important missing link between biographical expectations of the individual and macro-structural features of the life-course such as age norms and patterned sequences. Similarly, Heinz states that: “The notion of mighty cultural norms and the power of institutions to create and to control status passages to which individuals are allocated when they pass along their life-course prevail in the structural and normative discourses. These approaches present an over-socialized conception of the life-course because they neglect that life-courses are negotiated and emerge from changes between institutions, their gate-keepers and the biographical actor. It is the individual who has to connect multiple institutional

realities that he or she has to pass in constructing their biography” (Heinz 1992: 10). Gate-keeping activities are thus situated arrangements in which biographical norms are negotiated, enacted and sometimes refuted by biographical actors.

Nearly all transitions and status-passages are accompanied by gate-keepers, and their role for the indirect regulation of life-course passages is central. The notion of gate-keeper would apply to any institutional representative that potentially performs an activity that turns them into a gate-keeper: As Heinz puts it, “they are in charge of to assess persons according to criteria which decide on exit and entry from status passages” (Heinz 1992: 11). Any application for state-benefits (welfare state professionals), getting a job, an apprenticeship or a promotion (employers, supervisors), selection, admission, and track in school (teachers and counselors) are designing and controlling status-passages in the life-course and represent specific institutional and organizational gate-keeping contexts. Through their powerful decisions on the interface between organizational regulations and procedures and individual trajectories, they have a powerful stake in the regulation of the life-course. Behrens and Rabe-Kleberg propose a useful typology of gate-keepers by distinguishing gate-keeping activities in terms of degrees of formality and intensity of interaction: On the one side of the continuum (high formality, low intensity of interaction) stand professional experts, representatives of organizations, on the other side of the continuum stand superiors/coworkers and primary reference groups (characterized by a low formality but high intensity of interaction) (Behrens/Rabe Kleberg 1993: 242). Let’s just imagine the sheer number of gate-keepers relevant for a young person in transition from school to work in a dual vocational training system like Switzerland: teachers at school, vocational guidance counselors, providers of standardized competency tests, employers, etc. The fact that gate-keeping takes place on an inter-individual, microsocial level implies the situated application of institutional standards to individual biographies. These institutional standards can imply socially expected durations of qualification, standardized assessment tools that assess individuals according to their position in relation to a same-aged population but may also include softer “gate-keeping-criteria” that involves a serious amount of discretion on the side of the gate-keeper. Information formats such as “apprenticeship-readiness”, the degree to which an individual’s dispositions and characteristics “fit” a specific job description, or the display of a “sufficient motivation” all serve the purpose of “channel(ing) individuals into connecting status-passages or prescribe alternative, compensating pathways” (Heinz 1993: 11). It is clear that gate-keepers themselves do dispose of a considerable degree of discretion when it comes to the application and translation of these different criteria, nevertheless, they are embedded within an organizational environment. They do not act on their own but “act on behalf of their institutions and legitimize decisions by reference to organizational reality – that is, to “regulations, professional standards, application queues and so on” (Heinz 1993: 11). Our short example has



shown that gate-keeping encloses a whole range of activities. Firstly, these activities often rely on forms of “clinical reasoning”, organized through specific professions. Secondly, they often imply normalization practices, insofar use is made of standardized devices that promise to deliver objective knowledge on the properties of individuals, for instance through comparing the test-scores of individuals to a normal distribution. As Rabe-Kleeberg describes, standardisable features become an increasingly prerequisite for status-passages, as do specific professional experts (e.g. vocational counsellors and psychologists who perform standardized testing), a process which often leads to a “separation between expert and bureaucratic decision-maker” (Rabe-Kleeberg and Behrens 1993: 246) e.g. between the vocational counseling psychologist and the frontline worker at the employment agency. The recourse to standardized knowledge reminds us that principally, gate-keepers must maintain some sense of justification faced with actors within and outside of the organization through principally comprehensive and verifiable decision criteria. Secondly, according to Struck (2001), gate-keeping activities are also about the distribution of scarce, societal goods, (for instance, apprenticeship-positions) and accordingly, distributional decisions are done with recourse to criteria of efficiency and justice, often paired with knowledge deriving from specialized professional knowledge spheres. As “justice” and “efficiency” are highly ambivalent terms, it is more appropriate to describe gate-keepers decision making as being subjected to justification – decisions must be accountable and verifiable and follow socially accepted rules and regulations that resonate within the larger organizational environment of a gate-keeping institution. One may expect that there exist competing rules and principles for gate-keeping, that in part, reflect different stake-holders in the organizational environment: The attribution of apprenticeship places should follow both a procedural requirement of a fair process of selection on the basis of individual capacities and merit (and not on the basis of ascriptive characteristics such as race, class, gender) and follow some sense of economic efficiency – that is – “effective” in the sense that applicants should be matched with the adequate positions according to their capacities. Gate-keepers potentially have to “take into consideration the interests and interpretations of different actors” (Struck 2001: 39), and as such can take the role of “quasi-neutral” third parties, that balance different interests and standards of appropriateness, sometimes corresponding to the institutional logics and rationalities of their organizational environment. Standardized aptitude tests, but also the provision of internships within the “transition measures” analyzed in chapter six provide a good example. In their decisions (for instance, to “send” a young person to an internship in a specific sector – chapter 6.3.4), counsellors of transition measures must both apply the expectations of potential employers as potential gate-keeping criteria (in order to maintain exchange relations with their organizational environment), ensure consistent application of

legal standards) and consider – at least to a minimal extent, the biographical plans and preferences of the youngsters.

It has become clear that gate-keeping activities have a crucial partake in the distribution of social positions, hence, the social stratification of societies and access to different functional systems. As Heinz puts it, “gate-keeping interactions add up to shape life-courses of individuals by accepting or rejecting them as members of institutionalized collectivities” (Heinz 1993: 10-11). While until now, we have stressed the role of organizational rationalities and the effects of gate-keeping on the life-course, the next part of this thematic section is treating some elements of organizational gate-keeping practices. As has been described above, gate-keeping is in most cases not just a bureaucratic application of a general rule, but often consists in a combination of different (administrative, legal professional) practices that are applied and interpreted according to the case at hand. Thirdly, this implies work in the construction of “persons” of a particular kind, of processing of persons according to specific classification devices that mostly do not leave the person’s identity and self-understanding untouched. As Heinz puts it: “To open up a status-passage that is governed by an institution to a person he/she must first be defined according to the membership criteria or participatory criteria before a sorting process can start. A student has to “become” a high or low achiever in order to receive counseling concerning his or her placement in a status passage leading to an academic or a vocational career” (Heinz 1993: 13).

### 3.2.2. People Processing and People Changing Institutions

Organizations that perform gate-keeping activities that potentially lead to different outcomes for individuals can be differentiated according to the scope and intensity of their processing practices and the employed service technologies. Hasenfeld (1972, 1983, 2010) proposes to differentiate between “people processing” and “people changing” situations. While people changing institutions employ “a set of institutionalized procedures aimed at changing the physical, psychological, social or cultural attributes of people in order to transform them from a given status to a new prescribed status” (Hasenfeld 1983: 111), people processing organizations “attempt(ing) to achieve changes in their clients not by altering basic personal attributes, but by conferring on them a public status and relocating them in a new set of social circumstances“ (Hasenfeld 1972: 257). Gate-keeping institutions seem to reflect those properties that are expressed in people processing organizations: The assessment of biographies according to socially expected durations or of the performance individuals have made by spending time in passages of qualification is less connected with institutional attempts of altering the behavior of people who enter their jurisdiction. The latter is the case for people changing institutions, which aim at inducing “changes by identifying and defining the person’s attributes, so-

cial situation, and public identity” (Hasenfeld 1972: 259). Hasenfeld highlights that people processing organizations adapt their classification-disposition systems to their organizational environment and the markets units with whom they exchange: “people-processing organizations employ classification-disposition systems that reflect, in part, organizational adaptations to the constraints of their exchange relations with various market units receiving the processed clients” (ibid. 260). The classification as a “trainable” candidate, the provision of specific certificates, the public identity as a “jobseeker” and potential trainee prepare the status passage from one life-course stage to the other. These people changing activities “typically result(s) in both societal and self-reactions [...] It is through the anticipated reactions of significant others that the organization tries to change its clients’ social position and future behavior” (Hasenfeld 1972: 257).

### 3.2.3. Human Service Organizations as Discursive Environments for Self-Construction

Gubrium and Hollstein (1995) provide a description of the institutional regulation of the life-course within different institutional settings. The life-course “with its various patterns, phases, and stages” (Gubrium/Holstein 1995: 201) is seen to be an “interpretive accomplishment-created, sustained, and transformed through social interaction” (ibid.). Gubrium and Hollstein describe human service organizations as “discursive environments for self-construction” (Gubrium/Holstein 2003: 13), which foster “biographical work” (ibid.). This means that biographies (as identities over time) are produced and reproduced by individuals interacting in institutionalized settings. This also applies to classical human service organizations, insofar their institutional practice is a form of institutionally regulated biography transformation: “people processing institutions elicit, screen, fashion, and variously highlight personal narratives (. . .) and provide narrative frameworks for conveying personal experience (. . .) such organizations incite participants to construct the stories they need to do their work” (Gubrium/Holstein 1998: 164, emphasis added). Gubrium and Hollstein specify that new forms of social control imply an increasing deprivatization of the life-course (meaning that it becomes subject to public scrutiny), and therefore analytically should be approached as a trajectory through different institutionalized categorization schemes, which are appropriated, transformed, interiorized and last but not least reproduced in different interactional contexts. Delory-Momberger draws a direct link among the people processing technologies in labor-market integration schemes, the concept of biography and Foucault’s conception of “technologies of the self”. For Momberger (2007), the new intervention modalities found in labor-market integration policies are precisely inviting to “work on oneself”. On one side, the rationalization of these policies claims for a stronger standardization of interventions, a stronger regulation of professional and organi-

zational discretion. On the other side, the institutional aims seem to transfer this pressure on the beneficiaries of public action. This new logic of social intervention – i.e. inviting the individuals to “work on themselves” and on their own biographies – amounts exactly to what Foucault described as “technologies of the self” as they “allow(s) the individuals to effectuate on themselves, alone or with others those operations on their body and souls, their thoughts, their behavior their modes of being in the world” (Foucault 1984: 285, own translation). The institutional technologies described by Delory-Momberger in her analysis of new forms of governing unemployed subjects amounted to practices that tried to “put the service user in a situation in which he provides a narrative and an analysis of his experiences, defines some characteristics of his personality, help him to express his motivations and his interests in order to identify a professional self-project” (Delory-Momberger 2007: 126, own translation). Similarly, Astier and Duvoux (2006) diagnose an “increasing demand of biographical investment for the inscription of individuals in social institutions” (Astier/Duvoux 2006: 7), and state that “it is not the ability to act in conformity, but the ways and means by which one is able to say who one is and who one wants to be” (Astier/Duvoux 2006: 26 own translation) that is required to be a accepted member of society. It seems as if human service organizations foster specific forms of self-thematization and provide symbolic and cultural resources for individual’s “constructive activity in dealing with the available life course programs” (Kohli 1986: 272). The institutionalization of the life-course, as a process of modern state formation that singles out the individual as a distinctive, self-reliant actor is thus paralleled by new forms of social control and social regulation that do aim at creating “biographical” subjects, subjects that conceive their life as an individual self-project. As described in the previous chapter, the modern institution of a life-course is historically contingent on the specific pattern of modernity in which the “institution” of the individual and specific forms of individualized biographical self-descriptions have emerged. As Alois Hahn describes, the emergence of such self-descriptions is bound to specific occasions and situations: “The existence of forms of memory that symbolically represent his full vita (biographical self-reflection) depends on the existence of social institutions that allow such reflection of one’s own life” (Hahn 1987: 12). Hahn calls such institutions “biography generators” (ibid.) such as the religious confession, psychoanalysis, diaries, memoirs, medical record or testimonials at the court. These are historically contingent biography generators that urge the person to account for himself, to present his life-course, often through rough acts of selection and fictionalization, into an autobiographical pattern. Self-thematization, as a form of narrative identity, is thus bound to historically (and institutionally) contingent occasions, that make emerge a specific form of individuality. Alois Hahn describes that modern dispositives of discipline and control have played a crucial role in the making of narrative identity: “especially Foucault, but also in a different way, Elias has demonstrated that mod-

ern civilization is tied to processes of increased self-control which are eventually internalized and become measures of self-control" (Hahn 1987: 22, own translation). Hahn's concept does closely parallel Foucault's notion of "pastoral power" that has its roots within the Christian church and is then extended towards more commonly secular forms during the 18th century. According to Foucault, this form of power "cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people's minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it" (1988: 783). For Foucault, this individualizing mode of the exercise of power has spread and multiplied outside the ecclesiastical institution and extended to the state, which is in turn seen as a "modern matrix of individualization or a new form of pastoral power" (ibid.) While in the church it offered salvation of the soul in the next life, in western society it promises secular salvation through taking care of a person's health and well-being. The "institutional incitement to speak" (Foucault, 1978: 18, 67 f.) becomes widely dispersed and is embedded within the very fiber of day-to-day life. From the church to family life, to pedagogy, to policing, psychiatry, medicine, and labor relationships, the confessions acts as a central device to the outworking of power. While Foucault's description of the confession is mainly found in his history of sexuality, there are strong reminiscences to his earlier book "discipline and punish" (1979), in which he described how individuals within a surveillance society internalize the rules and regulations of their own subjection.

There is a central link between the emergence of modern forms of social work and counseling and Alois Hahn's conception of biography generators. The will to make oneself subject of discussion, of reflection and of inquiry is not rooted in a natural instinct but relies on specific institutional occasions: "we do not talk in a specific way about ourselves automatically, but because we have learned to do so in a specific manner depending on the occasion. Therefore, speaking about oneself is dependent on specific preconditions, because we require listener, reader, spectators to disclose ourselves" (Hahn 1995: 127, own translation). These possible selections and areas on which we disclose ourselves are predefined through the current institutional forms of self-thematization. These "social forms of self-thematization" (Hahn 1995: 128) are patterns that "generate" specific types of agentic individuals that are required by society, and that potentially "feed-back" on their self-conception. People changing institutions, or more particularly, the encounter between professionals and clients, for instance in counseling settings, is a specific institutional occasion for self-thematization. As Gubrium and Hollstein describe, "people changing institutions elicit, screen, fashion, and variously highlight personal narratives [...] and provide narrative frameworks for conveying personal experience [...] such organizations incite participants to construct the stories they need to do their work" (Gubrium/Holstein 1998: 164). They are biography-generators through which individuals are invited to narrate their experience under those selections and

fictionalizations that are proposed as schemata for self-thematization. They serve as resources for structuring selves. This is not a one-way process in which persons are categorized within institutionally and organizationally salient types, but they serve for the creation of “recognizable” identities, that are also used reflexively by persons to make sense of their lives circumstances and personal travails that lead to troubles.

The specific form of “biography generators” (Hahn 1995) and their historical contingency is well demonstrated by the emergence of specific job counseling formats and their specific *modus operandi*. Bachem (2013) describes the birth of job counseling in Switzerland in the 1920s and shows how it established as a tool to match “personalities” to “jobs”. Bachem describes early Job counseling as characterized by a “calculatory logic in which not only “jobs” but also “personalities” are apprehended and inscribed into economic relations” (Bachem 2013: 70). While at the beginning the personality-job relation was characterized by a numerical-economic conception, it quickly spread to the development of measurement tools for capacities and specific “traits” of persons as well as towards individualized counseling settings. This entailed a new legitimacy for a specific expert-culture that was sustained through the promise of social and individual-biographical legitimacy. The development of psychometric assessment tools, of specific formats in which young job choosers are led to explore their personalities and perform an (individually and socially legitimized) job choice, can be seen as specific forms of “modern” pastoral power. In the wake of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the group of persons requiring job counseling has been strongly extended (see e.g. Bachem 2013; Thiel 2004, Gröning 2010: 80). Not only school leavers but also persons that are deemed to offer their labor power on the labor market are treated as potentially in need of career counseling. The lifelong “job – personality” link valid in the apogee of the fordist normal life-course is replaced by project-oriented, flexible and temporary “matchings” in post-industrial societies. The example of job counseling also describes quite well the different modes of objectification “transforming human beings into subjects” (Foucault 1988: 777): From the “modes of objectification that try to give themselves the status of sciences” (ibid.) and that produce knowledge on subjects (e.g. psychometric tests, theories of personality traits that are largely found in vocational counseling psychology and that emerged during the Fordist work arrangement (e.g. Holland 1996, Gottfredson 2002) on to “dividing practices” (Foucault 1988: 778), that distinguish the “normal” from the “deviant” towards the “technologies of the self”, that is – modes in which a “human being turns himself into a subject” (ibid.) and in which “men learned to recognize themselves as subjects” (ibid.). The changes in the modalities of counseling go hand in hand with changes in the modes in which counseling discursively takes hold of the subject, the ways in which they are subjected to specific demands of justification. The administrative focus on persons is replaced by a modality that calls on the individual

responsibility of clients and that replaces the government from external arrangements towards the interiority, self-governance, and self-control of persons. After all, the nature of counseling does not aim at prescribing a specific meaning but to "determine latencies and through this, open decision spaces in which individuals are expected to behave self-reflexively, are constructed as "empowered and active individuals" (Schützeichel 2014: 38, own translation). They are a form of generating biographical self-reflexivity because they put the counselled into the role of individual decision-makers.

### 3.2.4. Human Service Organizations as Subjectivation Devices

The regulation of biographies through technologies of the self matches with the description of new rationalities of control in individualized societies. The new distribution of responsibility between the individual and the state has direct implications on human service provision, as it comes with the demand and obligation to construct and reconstruct subjectivity as the capacity to be autonomous, to set goals to oneself and to operate desirable self-regulation. In comparison to old forms of social control, in which social control stresses conformity, "governing in a liberal-democratic way means governing *through* the freedom and aspirations of subjects rather than in spite of them" (Rose 1998: 155). Foucault's concept of governmentality tries to account for the limitations that the spreading of liberal rights (and the separation between different "spheres", e.g. between the private and the public (Walzer 1983) has put on governmental rule. As the state has to be neutral towards different ways of life and preferences of citizens, and as such cannot impose ways of doing and acting, the regulation of the private sphere produced by liberal democratic political mentalities is provided through the "proliferation of experts grounding their authority on knowledge and technique: medics, social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists, counsellors, and advisers" (Rose 1998: 197). Gubrium and Holstein describe this process, in which new "technologies of expertise" (Rose 1998) become increasingly relevant within institutionalized settings of human service organizations, as a "de-privatization" of the life-course (Gubrium/Holstein 1995: 222): "shared understandings, descriptive agendas, and organizational and professional orientations provide expanding and ever-changing bases for life course usage" (Gubrium/Holstein 1995: 222). For Gubrium and Holstein, the rise of social service professionals parallels a dramatical change in the relation between the personal self and society. Their analysis of institutional identity work, that is the "production of people by human service workers in organizationally circumscribed ways" (Hollstein 1992: 33) shows that the micro-processes in which personal selves are constructed according to the identity formats of institutions amount to a new form of social control that focusses less on direct disciplinary control than a more or less subtle exercise of power that produces the "self". As Hollstein acknowledges,

his theory is indebted to Michel Foucault's work on the constitution of subjects (ibid.: 26) and his attempts to "create a history of the different modes by which in our culture, human beings are made subjects" (Foucault 1988: 777). The exercise of power that is at stake in processes of subjectivation is not a power that constrains and coerces an otherwise free individual, nor is it a power that fully and uncontradictory determines the conduct of individuals by simply serving a "ruling class" or a central institution. In his seminal work *Discipline and Punish* (1977), but also in his work on sexuality, Foucault shows how a "dispositive", as a network of local power relations that can be made up of architectural arrangements, discourses, institutions, legal prescriptions, reglementary decisions, philosophic and moral assertions, have the capacity to create a "subject" a "soul", a "psyche" (Foucault 1977: 38). These local arrangements (a classroom, a prison, a workshop, a hospital) are places in which subjects are "subjected" and should subjectivate themselves. Neither is there simply one kind of subject possible nor is the number of possible subject positions infinite. The dispositive operates a "conduct of conduct", it does not "dominate" – it controls and governs towards specific objectives. Within the specific objectives of the dispositive the subject will to a certain degree, be able to subject himself, to determine oneself, for instance through referring to specific forms of knowledge and discourses. The dispositive will propose to the subject different lines of conduct, which in their sum, direct the subject towards the common objective of the dispositive. As such it does not determine the conduct of persons directly, but subtly "produces" a subject. For instance, a classroom has a specific material arrangement (the teachers desk, subtly placed higher than the pupils benches, placed opposite to the teacher, specific regulations (school law, curriculums), class registers, philosophic, moral, scientific knowledge (e.g. biannual school bulletins, objectifying the effort of a pupil in relation to the mean grades of the class), making "visible" a specific knowledge on the pupil, and last but not least, discourses that make up the dispositive of the "classroom". A pupil may be confronted with a multitude of imperatives that emerge from such a dispositive: "I have to be careful in class" – "for the teacher in front of me it suffices to display an appearance of attentiveness" – "If I do not get a diploma, I will not get a job" – "I have to try harder, x percent of youngsters are unemployed" – "comrades in class whom I want to befriend mock people being attentive". Dispositives exert a specific form of power that:

"applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize, and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects" (Foucault 1988: 781).

The subject appears in a relation of power, power is the condition of possibility of the subject, and brings the subject to develop a specific relation towards oneself



within the constraining forces of subjectivation. The latter implies that there is a specific autonomy within heteronomy. Neither are individuals anthropologically “free”, nor are individuals overdetermined and dominated. This relation between autonomy and heteronomy, the twofold effects of a dispositive, both as “constraining” force and productive power is reflected in the French term “*assujettissement*”, referring both to the subjecting and the subjectivating dimension of such processes. As such the meaning of the word “subject” entails a double meaning that encompasses both the constraining as well as the enabling side of power: “subject to someone else by control and dependence and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to” (Foucault 1988: 781). In Foucault’s “use of pleasure” (1985) he further describes the methodological stance taken: A history of codes, so it goes, should not only analyse the

“the different systems of rules and values that are operative in a given society or group, the agencies or mechanisms that enforce them, the forms they take in their multifariousness[...]” (but also the – S.D.) “way in which individuals are urged to constitute themselves as subjects of moral conduct [...] and the models proposed for setting up and developing relationships with the self, for self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination for the decipherment of the self by oneself, for the transformations that one seeks to accomplish with oneself as an object” (Foucault 1985: 29).

Foucault defeats any notion of a pre-social, reflexive and self-transparent entity that secures human autonomy. It is only through the social process of subjectivation that person subject themselves to specific matrices and schemes, so as they become socially recognized individuals that are equipped with reflexivity, interests, and autonomy.

As has been described in the literature on contemporary forms of “governmentality”, social work can be described as being part of the “art of government which depends upon and facilitates the proliferation of techniques for the disciplinary integration of individuals into the social order” (Burchell 1991: 147). This art of government “delineate(s) space for the possible formation of a tactically polymorphous technology of governmental technology for governing the life of individuals which aims at fashioning the forms of conduct and performance appropriate to the productive insertion into (and exclusion from) the varied circuits of social life” (ibid). Each political model implies a kind of anthropology, a concept of the citizen that is at the foundation of this order. For the late capitalist liberal democracies, this anthropological prerequisite is the “legitimized actor of modernity” (Meyer 2001), which is self-responsible and self-sufficient. The production of this self-sufficient individual requires to install different processes of subjectivation which aim at “emancipating” a self, which can inscribe and narrate oneself into a symbolic or-

der. Social Work, as a governmental technology contributes to the production of the subject expected in the contemporary forms of regulation of society (Pattaroni 2005). For late liberal societies, this amounts to the “creation of clients who can create themselves” (Andersen 2007), respectively to the production of “individuality herself, independently capable of action and driven by her internal motivations” (Ehrenberg 1999: 311). This switch of responsibility from public institutions to the individual can be described as a “subjectivisation of the social” (Lessenisch 2011: 317). The subject is addressed in a “pedagogical” way, in which it is asked to change his relation to oneself and that towards others. Proponents of the governmentality studies have described these rationalities and pointed to the fact that these involve “practices of self-formation, practices concerned to shape the attributes, capacities, orientations and moral conduct of individuals, and to define their rights, obligations and statuses” (Dean 1995: 567).

The ethos of the liberal self is also expressed in the strong use of contractual arrangements within welfare settings, in which a contract between the client and the professional is instructed. The idea of the contract corresponds exactly to the idea of the citizen of the advanced liberal state (or in Meyer’s words, the authorized actor of modernity) – an individual – as a morally self-responsible person, who autonomously sets goal for oneself, equipped with a strong will and able to comply with its self-set goals. The notion of the contract enshrines the liberal idea of citizenship – “a voluntary agreement between independent and autonomous beings [...] in principle free in their goods and persons” (Castel 1995: 449). Castel links the emergence of contractual agreements to a rise of “negative individualism” where the “contractual matrix” is “demanded or indeed dictated, that impoverished individuals behave like autonomous persons” (Castel 1995: 449). Similarly Born and Jensen (2010) describe the growing use of contracts between the state and its citizens for instance as “individual action plans” (IAP’s), as new societal rationality of governing people. For Born and Jensen, the IAP interview is a good example of the production of subjects for inculcating the new ethic of “desirable self-regulation” (Dean 2007). The authors describe the IAP as a form of “dialogue-based activation” (Born and Jensen 2010: 326) that is a “dispositive” in the Foucauldian sense. It constitutes a new type of rationality and subject formation which “[...] institutionalises new expectations to the subjects, namely that they are to be reflexive and responsible for themselves, which involves a new type of identity production” (Born/Jensen 2010: 328). The IAP is a tool for an “internal subjectivation process” (Born/Jensen 2010: 328) which “creates the individual as a responsible self-observer, who acts upon him/herself” (ibid) and who is inciting the beneficiary to “to present or narrate yourself in a new manner in forms which makes you a participant in a dialogue leading [...] to create and maintain an identity through the reproduction and renewal of the autobiographical narrative” (Born/Jensen 2010: 330). According to these authors, the contractual matrix in welfare arrangements serves

as generative machinery for narratives and socially mediated self-interpretations. They serve for the creation of accountable, reliable “biographies”. The mechanism through which the contractual matrix works has been pointedly described by Andersen (2007, 2016) who links the rise of contractual arrangements in welfare settings to the Foucauldian notion of governmental rule through technologies of the self. According to Andersen, contractual relations between the administration and the citizens also become contracts between “citizens and their own selves” (Andersen 2007: 119). They thus serve “not only to commit clients to a specific behavior but first and foremost to commit them to a particular inner dialogue about obligation and freedom” (Andersen 2007: 119). It attributes to individuals the burden to construct and rebuild their subjectivity, as a capacity to perform a form of self-government. As Dean Mitchell describes, governing the unemployed self seeks “ethical effectiveness in the shaping of the relation of self to self” (Dean 1995: 575). This is consistent with the foundational idea of “autonomy” – which exactly enshrines the idea of a person giving “laws” to him/her self (auto: self; nomos: rules), which are based on one’s own volition. The acceptance of a contractual arrangement by the client comes down to an acceptance of the obligation to “transform” himself: “It is a way of admonishing the subject to invoke itself” (Andersen 2007: 137). The link to concepts of Foucauldian governmentality studies is obvious, as – how Rose describes, the liberal rule operates through “the inculcation of particular kinds of relations that the human being has with itself” (Rose: 2004: 42). The paradoxical form of invoking the “autonomous subject” by contractual agreements, amounts according to Anderson – to conceive “freedom as an obligation [...] while at the same time presuppose freedom because otherwise there could not be any obligation towards freedom” (Anderson 2007: 137). In governmentality studies, these techniques have been described as “technologies of Agency” (Dean 1995) or as “technologies of citizenship” (Cruikshank 1999) which bring the subject in a (self-reflective, self-monitoring) relation towards oneself.

### **3.2.5. Towards an Analysis of Subjectivation Processes in Human Service Organizations**

The classification systems of life-course gate-keepers and of welfare professionals not only structure the institutional processing of persons through a “transition system” but also impact on the self-interpretations and biographical self-descriptions of the classified, that is the young persons. Human beings in general, and especially “clients” or “beneficiaries” of public action are – in the words of Hacking – “interactive kinds” (Hacking 2004) which means that they react, interact with and apply cultural categories and classifications to themselves and others. When people reflect on themselves (or when they give auto-biographical accounts of themselves) they necessarily drawback on a symbolic-semantic field of language. This

field is unavoidably structured by powerful discourses, which restrict the field of the “sayable”, the thinkable and “do-able”. The question at stake is then “how [...] the space of possible and actual action determined not just by physical and social barriers and opportunities, but also by the ways in which we conceptualize and realize who we are and what we may be, in this here and now?” (Hacking 2004: 287). This approach should be able to account for the fact that “actors understanding and experience of their social identity, the social world and their place in it is discursively constructed” (Frazer 1990: 282). Actors understand themselves and express their experience only through the categories available to them in discourse. I will argue that the empirical studies cited above show that Foucauldian governmentality studies and concepts from life-course research and research on biographies can be fruitfully combined. We know for instance that the

“typifications of clients via diagnoses, treatments, and inferences of causality are socially constructed categories (... that) publicly confer a moral status to clients, they provide moral justifications for the actions caregivers take, and clients internalize them as a reflection of their own self-identity and valuation” (Hasenfeld 2009: 73).

Hasenfeld’s preclusion of a link between professional knowledge categories and the reflection of these categories within the self-descriptions and self-interpretations of the processed clients is highly important for the further development of my argument. The internalisation of specific institutionally provided categories and self-descriptions is a process through which clients are encouraged to take a particular, institutionally mediated relation towards themselves. Here the Foucauldian “technologies of the self” as those “procedures that tell the individual how to define their identity, maintain it and develop it in order to meet certain goals of self-control and self-consciousness” (Andersen 2007), joins a definition of biography as socially mediated self-interpretations: Biographical research has increasingly tried to describe the interrelation between biography, discourse, and subjectivity” (Dausien 2011) and posits that an “autobiographer does not present itself and act in a certain way [...] only based on its subjective process of becoming, neither based on structural determinants, but that he is also subjugated to discourses” (Schäfer/Völter 2005: 178, own translation). This perspective includes critical scrutiny on how the subject becomes intelligible towards her/himself, and how s/he recognizes herself through discourses. Jenkins establishes a direct relation between processes of institutional classification and processes of biographical self-descriptions, here referred to as “institutional careers”: “careers”, so it goes “are as much the products of categorizations as of self-identification and self-determination” (Jenkins 2002: 12). Jenkins joins Hacking in stating that “likely futures” are not simply an “objective” fact, but they partially result from the “categorization work done by strategically placed others” (ibid. 2002: 13). Processes of categorization – and the respective

processes of identification with these categorizations “have material consequences” (ibid.). They open pathways, define eligibility for help and finally, secure that young person’s aspirations and self-understandings are attuned to the social positions foreseen for them. Dubar and Demazière, two researchers in the field of biographical studies in France go even further and argue that individual “identity forms”, thus the ways in which subjects narrate themselves are at the same time oriented towards the construction of a recognized self-definition that “suffices at the same time for the subject itself and is as well validated by those institutions that validate it and that frame it through categorizing it” (Dubar 1998: 74 own translation). This quote strongly reminds the double meaning of the notion of “subject”: being, through control and dependence “subjected” to somebody, and secondly gaining self-awareness and recognizing oneself as a “subject”. Both meanings presuppose a form of power that “transform(s) human beings into subjects” (Foucault 1982: 779ff). This is a form of power that is rooted in the everyday life practices of actors, operating through categorization and the imposition of “laws of truth” (ibid.). In this understanding, it is a form of power that makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word “subject”: subject to someone else by control and dependence and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to (Foucault 1982: 781). Subjects become intelligible towards themselves within discursive frameworks that induce it to understand himself in a certain way, to develop a specific relation to oneself and to design oneself in a specific way (Bröckling 2012: 131). This points to a specific conception of individual agency. The space of the possible, in Hacking’s words, is pre-structured by discourse insofar the field of language and meaning favor some, but not other self-descriptions and self-interpretations. Hacking has captured this dimension by using the term “making up” persons, pointing to the interaction between “categorized person” and “category” itself. Human beings are seen as “interactive kinds” (Hacking 2004: 104) who, especially when classifications are “known by people or by those around them, and put to work in institutions, change the ways in which individuals experience themselves—and may even lead people to evolve their feelings and behavior in part because they are so classified” (Hacking 2004: 104). Hacking points to the importance of professional knowledge categories and expert knowledge put in place by social science, through which, for instance, addressees of public policies are made “thinkable by being made visualizable, inscribable, and assessable” (Rose 1998: 112). Categories such as “neets”, “staus-zero youth”, “struggling young adults”, or more specific, public categories like “young persons from the lower school pathways”, are descriptive categories that emerge from the general public and scientific discussion. They have an impact on how young people come to conceive themselves and their biographical trajectory. These categories are new ways of describing and classifying behavior, are “not only to identify people but to re-describe their identity (or a feature of their identity) so

that as individuals they can consider recognizable and accountable from society” (Sparti 2001: 331). What Sparti is pointing to (and what one can, in my opinion also formulate from a Foucauldian perspective) is that specific actions and ways of being in the world can only be recognized as such (and thus become subject to political scrutiny) insofar the cognitive categories for doing so exist. Again Sparti: “before certain categories emerge – before certain before a description becomes available (hence before a given classification made) – it is simply not possible to be recognized as “acting (intentionally) under that description” (Sparti 2001: 341). The space of intelligible acts (and of tellable acts, acts for which one can be held accountable) is predetermined by having a vocabulary for describing them as such.

There is a further convergence between subjectivation theory and biographical research that emerges from the theory of “narrative selves” (Christman 2009) and from research on narrative identity. This constitutes a strand of theory that reminds us of the epistemic foundations of biographical-narrative research. This epistemic foundation involves the basic choice to conceive persons as “self-interpreting animals” (Taylor 1985), which only gain agency through developing language-mediated self-interpretations. This “social mediatedness” of individual narratives (or of “selves”) implies that individuals will inevitably “use concepts gleaned from the language(s) she speaks and the subtleties of meaning provided by the social world within which that language is developed” (Christman 2009: 84). This can for instance be observed in the self-reflective activity that is implied in narrative interviewing, in which individuals try to develop “accountable” descriptions of their experience which are “tellable” that means which will make sense to a certain audience. The language-mediated practical relations to oneself, used methodologically as a tool for analysing biographies, is thus hardly conceivable as being detached from “discourse” as individuals will – in the course of their interview have to account as well for the objective features of that discursive space (e.g. being labeled as a bad student) but will also have to draw back on the available symbolic semantic field of the institutionally provided vocabulary. This implies the use of commonly acknowledged categories and taken-for-granted interpretation of the world. Agency, as the ability to imagine different courses of action, to act in a certain way rather than another (Giddens 1987: 3) is strongly influenced, as well in an enabling, but also in a constraining way, by these discursive categories.

The relation between biography and discourse becomes even clearer when we have a look at classical accounts of narrative theory. Individuals construct their biographies (that is, their “identity over time”), with the aim of being “readable” to others and to themselves, or as Bruner writes referring to Paul Ricoeur, “narrative is centrally concerned with cultural legitimacy” (Bruner 1991), with its “tellability” towards a symbolic order. Insofar young persons must draw back on institutionalized vocabularies to describe themselves to others (in terms of giving accountable self-presentations), but as well in order to develop a reflexive relation towards

themselves, their “personal social identity can only be expressed and understood through the categories available to them in discourse” (Frazer 1989: 282). This implies the use of commonly acknowledged categories and taken-for-granted interpretation of the world. Agency, as the ability to imagine different courses of action, to act in a certain way rather than another is strongly influenced, as well in an enabling, but also in a constraining way, by these discursive categories. The network of discourses and practices produces subjectivity as it sets the framework for self-descriptions and defines the range of possible acceptable horizons of action.

An important cautionary note applies here. While research studies inspired by Foucault analyze “subjectivation” processes as an effect of symbolic orders, in which subjects are “produced” through discourse, we should not presuppose a seamless and unambiguous process of appropriation of subject positions. This has already been described above through reference to Butlers’ theory of subjectivation. Deducing the constitution of subjects simply from discursive codes may fade out differences within the appropriation and interpretation of these cultural codes and practices. Actors are no simple “symbolic fools” (Garfinkel 1987) which are positioned through discourse, but they can relate, interpret and (at least to some extent) reflexively operate with the discursive categories offered and attributed to them. The latter is amongst others suggested by Stuart Hall, who critically discusses Foucault’s “decentered subject”. Here, Foucault’s work is not interpreted as a move that ultimately leads to the “dead” or the “abolition” of the subject, but as an invitation to “to rearticulate the relationship between subjects and discursive practices”. (Hall 1996: 16). Hall’s allegation can be read as an invitation to take up an empirical investigation of the sites and practices that act as missing link between discourses and identities: “Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies” (Hall 1996: 17). Within such a conception, there are sufficient reasons to concede a certain autonomy to the subject within the heteronomy of discourse. Stuart Halls concept of “articulation” may offer a point of departure – maintaining the Foucauldian idea that there exists no “outside” to discourse but highlighting that identities must rather be conceived as “points of suture, points of temporary attachment” (Hall 1996: 65) between discourse and individuals. This is strongly related to a conception of actors as both heteronomous and equipped with a bounded agency and where the capacity to act is intertwined with taking up specific positionalities present in discourse: “you only discover who you are because of the identities you are required to take on, into which you are interpellated: but you must take up those positionalities, however temporarily, in order to act at all.” (Ibid.). Insofar as subjectivation is understood as a process in which the subject recognizes itself as an intelligible, agentic being through recognizing himself from

the background of discursively produced normality patterns, it not only restrains certain forms of self-understanding but also enables other ones.

Foucault's theoretical legacy is often criticized because it conceives subjects as mere effect of structures, thereby bracketing out the relative autonomy of subjects. Nevertheless, this seems to be a selective misreading of Foucault's multifarious and dispersed works. Rather, as Kelly highlights, his focus on the power of discourse traces back to his earlier writings while in his later works he acknowledges both the politically constituted and constitutive nature of the subject:

"Foucault's interest is in showing *the extent to which* subjects are the effects of discourses or power by bracketing the relative autonomy of the subject. In the mid-'70s, Foucault is focused on a binary choice between the theory of sovereignty and the theory of domination, between the notion of the subject as politically *constitutive* and the notion of the subject as politically *constituted*. Ultimately, he will acknowledge that something more reciprocal and complex is going on: subjects are creating themselves like pearls around the foreign particles of power" (Kelly 2010: 89).

As the example given above that describes subjectivation through the dispositive of the school (3.2.4) shows, it seems more appropriate to talk about autonomy within heteronomous structures. Subjects *are* indeed produced in dispositives, and power *is* a condition for the subject. But as Kelly writes, Foucault's writings draw a strict distinction between "*assujettissement*" (often translated as subjugation, designating the process of becoming subordinated by power) and *subjectivation*. While the term "subjectivation", only used by Foucault since the 1980s "only refers to our constitution as subjects in one sense, namely the active one, even if this constitution is not possible in practice without also being constituted as a passive subject" (Kelly 2010: 87). To gain a deeper understanding of the autonomy within heteronomy idea that I have portrayed here, we might turn to Butler's concept of subjectivation which gives Foucault's initial idea an interesting turn through re-accentuating the relation between power-knowledge complexes and subjectivity. Just as in Foucault's notion of subjectivation, power-knowledge complexes have a regulating effect on subjectivity, but Butler highlights how the effects of discourses are constantly performatively created. Subjectivation is, in Butler's notion, a process of iteration through the self, which also includes acts of desire full identification with specific figures of subjects. As Butler writes in *Gender Trouble*, "The subject is not determined by the rules through which it is generated because signification is not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects" (Butler 1999: 185). The former do not determinate identity, but "condition and restrict culturally intelligible practices of identity" (*ibid.* 184). In a response to a special issue on the relevance of Judith Butler's theory of subjectivation for edu-



cation in the *British Journal of Sociology of Education* (2006), Butler responds to several articles that explore the relevance of her concepts for educational research. Referring to Althusser's notion of interpellation, Butler suggests that "socialization" has to be thought in light of both subject formation and the subjugation to power:

"The student achieves precisely through mastering skills, and this mundane practical appropriation of norms and rules culminates in 'excellent work' and fine marks that can be recognized publicly as such. The acts of skill acquisition are thus modes of subject formation, and this formation takes place within a set of norms that confer or withdraw recognition. Put more precisely, these norms operate through a demoralization of experience: the subject is constituted through the anticipation or fear of having recognition conferred or denied" (Butler 2006: 532).

According to Butler – here exemplified through the practice of grading – subjectivation happens through an ambivalent relation of the subject to the norm, to a symbolic order of recognition that maintains the possibility of withdrawal of recognition. Therefore, "anxiety is built in the norm" (*ibid.* 532) which makes the iterative, repeated application of the norm central for subjectivation. As Davies describes,

"This should not be confused with determinism in which subjects are passively and inevitably shaped according to one set of discursive practices within a monolithic moral order. Butler's subjects have agency, albeit a radically conditioned agency, in which they can reflexively and critically examine their conditions of possibility and in which they can both subvert and eclipse the powers that act on them and which they enact" (Davies 2006: 426).

Davies's critique points to the need to analyze the specific forms of subjectification "in action", induced by the institutional categorisations and classification systems, the "people processing technologies" and the "practices" at the frontline level impact on the self-interpretations of the young persons. The knowledge categories and cognitive categories used by welfare professionals have both an objectifying and a subjectifying character. On the one side, they shape the young person as institutionally recognisable subjects (for instance as a person having not enough skills to enter a certain apprenticeship). On the other hand, young people learn to act as "subjects" through "subjecting" and reorganizing themselves within this discursive vocabulary.

## 4. Analyzing Activation in Action

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Social Work, particularly in the field of employment promotion, can be described as a “co-ruler” in the life course regime (Walther 2006). Not only are its target groups constructed around the “normal-biographical life-course” (Kohli 1985) but it also affirms a normalization-function towards this “standard-biographical” life-course. In doing so, social work is not only structured around the life-course in terms of sequences and positions but also directly impacts on young people’s biographical projects and plans. The first part of the previous chapter has highlighted the role of macro-features of the welfare state for the structuration of the life-course – for instance through normative modeling (Leisering 2003) of sequences and events of the life-course. The second part of the previous chapter has shown that human service organizations can be seen as the “missing link” between macro-level and micro-level in the regulation of the life-course. The life-course (or rather, its individual form, the biography) is regulated on the level of the subject, in and through the practices at the frontline level of schools, social work agencies, and career counseling centers. This chapter thus further develops a micro-perspective that connects analytically the social regulation of transitions within concrete human service organizations. Insofar the transition from school to work can be read as inclusion/exclusion with a specific functional system of a society (in our case, the economy and the apprenticeship system), we will have to analyze the change in identity segments and life-conduct performed in the human service organizations that are connected with such a status passage. The organizational regulation of status passages does not only involve a subjective coping with new demands based on specific life-phases but involves a whole set of other actors and practices. This is enshrined in Anselm Strauss’ concept of “trajectories”, defining “the total organization of work done over that course, plus the impact on those involved with that work and its organization” (Strauss et al. 1985: 8). At first glance, we see that many of the activities of human service organizations in the field of transitions have direct biographical relevance and point towards the goal to transmit life-course related normality patterns. The overall aim of the “Motivational Semesters” (analysed in chapter 6) – to integrate participants in the labor market – is seeking to be achieved by a range of activities that can without any doubt be called “regulation of status passages”

and that are geared towards producing a specific form of biographical subjectivity attuned to specific normative requirements of the standardized life-course. Those that do not correspond to the normality patterns of the Swiss life-course regime become addressees of a system of secondary normalization that confronts them with specific demands in terms of identities and self-understandings. In the analyzed scheme, the integration of participants into the labor market is meant to be achieved through personal evaluation interviews, attempts to push youngsters that are reluctant to decide for a specific job towards a career choice, while verifying the fit of their career choice with their effective competences and the realities of the “world of work” through standardized assessments and a confrontation to different work settings. Both the construction of specific subjective biographical dispositions and a “gate-keeping” function of human service organizations is thus salient in this very basic description of the program. As largely discussed in the previous chapter, the life course is at the same time an institutional program and a subjective construction (Kohli 1985). This chapter will analyze how human service organization regulates status-passages on this level of subjective construction, that is, by “redefine(ing) the identities and knowledge categories by which people perceive themselves and their situation” (Leisering 2004). The contribution of welfare institutions as institutional gate-keepers for the transmission of macro- and mesostructures into micro-sociological – meaning life-course decision and biographical actions of individuals during transitions between life-phases (Struck 2001: 22) as well as the forms of biographical self-construction (Gubrium/Holstein 1998: 164) described in the previous chapter are investigated. We might suspect that these biographical function of human service organizations excel in the context of the activating welfare state, in which Social Work is switching from simple “people processing institutions” (Hasenfeld 1973) (in which eligibility is checked and people are given certain benefits for the sake of their living situation) to “people changing” institutions (ibid.), in which increasingly, the persons own dispositions, aspirations, and motivations come to the fore. In this context, in which state intervention is more and more focusing on and building around the individuality of a person, Social Work may become a kind of “activation-pedagogy” (Kessl 2006), a transmission belt which translates the legal regulations and demands to the clients. In the context of a so-called “individualization” of policies (Borghini/ Van Berkel 2007) – the nexus of policy-making switches to the frontline level of the interaction with the client. In fact, as Ludwig Mayerhofer points out, while pedagogical interventions where, in the Keynesian welfare state arrangement one form of intervention among many others, they are now – as a mean for producing self-responsible subjects – in a keyswitch position. The “pedagogisation of socio-political thoughts” (Kessl 2006: 229, own translation) and the production of a “flexible habitus” (Mauger 2001)– implies that individual subjects are put at the center of attention. The individualization of social policies (Borghini/Van Berkel 2007), pointing at the activation

of the individual responsibility for shaping one's own integration trajectory and are aiming at fostering the "promotion of desirable self-regulation" (Dean 2007), in which increasingly the motivations (embodied through a norm of subjective engagement and the demand to be the actor of one's own re-integration, dispositions, and attitudes of the young people) come to the fore. Secondly, the process of contractualisation described in chapter three is tantamount to a re-assessment of the distribution of responsibility between the state and the individual (Serrano-Pascual 2007). Citizenship is transformed from "status to contract" (Handler 2003). The self-governing, autonomous individual is the underlying ethos (Yeatman 2009) of these arrangements. According to scholars which analyze social work in the light of its "neo-social re-programmation" (Otto/Kessl 2006), the organizational technologies and professional practices that are brought forward can be conceptualized as "technologies of the self" (Foucault, 1988), that activate the capacities for self-regulation and for responsible life-conduct of individual clients. In a very concrete way, the development of an individual professional project, the production of self-knowledge through psychological assessment forms and tests are promoting a certain "biographical reflexivity" and are pointing to fostering a "planificatory" and instrumental posture towards one own biography. In this sense, these "technologies of agency" (Dean 1995) are the organizational tools through which young people are brought to develop a realistic attitude towards one's own labor market prospects, to evaluate one's own experiences and motivation and to make emerge a realistic and realizable professional project. Social Work, in this sense, is participating in the "production" of subjects, which have the right disposition and attitudes for the labor market (Darmon/Perez 2011: 77). While on the one hand, the transition from school to work is increasingly asking self-oriented articulated planning-like activities (Giddens 1990) from the young persons, addressed as individuals-as-projects (Meyer 2004), on the other hand, the "regularization of the education-occupation link directly implies an increase in the social management or structuration of the life course" (ibid. 2004).

These new "rationalities" of governing individuals have been manifoldly described (Kessl 2006, Dean 2007), but the concrete practical mechanisms of production of active citizens have rarely been described with more detail, notably neither in their dimension of frontline implementation, nor in the biographical dimension, e.g. their impact on the future-oriented self-conceptions of clients. Research indicates that the conversion towards the activating state does result in a higher relevance of pedagogical interventions (v.s. monetary interventions) and implies a growing relevance of the frontline dimension of "activation work" (Van Berkel/van der Aa 2012). The policy paradigm of "activation" comes with an emphasis on active citizenship, both responsible for and able to achieve economic self-reliance. It seems clear that the increased focus on conditionality criteria, the stronger individualization of services, as well as the implementation of a contradictory mix between

“client-centeredness” and “compulsion” (Lindsay/Mailand 2004: 196) increases the need for discretion on the frontline level and requires focusing on the “everyday encounters” between welfare professionals and clients. Insofar clients are required to be “guided by an autonomous will” (Andersen 2008: 77), to conceive of oneself as an “active” and “entrepreneurial” self increasingly becomes a pre-condition for access to help, it makes sense to focus on the everyday practice of activation as a site where the relation between individual citizens and the state is negotiated. Activation must be analyzed as an ambivalent social practice (Marston/Larsen/McDonald 2005, Ludwig-Mayerhofer 2007). Methodologically, this requires to open up the Black Box of policy implementation and to move beyond the analysis of law regulations, official program descriptions and policy papers, in order to analyze the practices and interpretation patterns of frontline case-managers. Microsociological methods, “working with detailed protocols of practices, allow privileged access to research those things that constitute the activating state” (Mayerhofer et. al: 2007: 23 own translation). This research perspective has received increasing attention in the last years throughout different European countries (see Marston/Larsen/McDonald 2005 for Australia and Denmark, Mayerhofer 2009 or Ott 2011 for Germany, Schallberger/Wyer 2010 for Switzerland, Dubois 2010 or Fassin 2013 for France). The following chapter will, therefore, describe the tools required for analyzing – beyond the formal policy designs – how a specific, legally coded policy is implemented and transformed into specific organizational practices. How do the rules, structures, and discourses of the activating state become operative in concrete actions of frontline professionals?

#### **4.1. Street-level Bureaucrats, Institutionalized Organizations and People Processing Organizations**

The new focus on the frontline level of human service organizations can be traced back to the early contributions of administration science scholars. As early as in the 1980s Michael Lipsky highlighted that street-level bureaucrats (henceforth: SLBs), that is “public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work” (1980: 3) – should be acknowledged and conceptualized as the last link in the policy-making process. Lipsky claimed to regard policy as processes of interaction involving different social actors. Only in the interaction between caseworkers and clients comes social policy to life. Lipsky highlighted the need to analyze frontline staff practices of discretion, rule-breaking, client categorization, and the ways in which street-level bureaucrats adapt, subvert, and creatively reconfigure the policy goals they are meant to implement. In a nutshell, SLB-theory argues that “public policy is not best understood as made in legislatures or top-floor suites of high-rank-

ing administrators because in important ways it is actually made in the crowded offices and daily encounters of street-level workers” (1980, xii). His focus on the frontline implementation level was driven by the observation that public organizations were marked by different conditions that virtually made frontline discretion necessary. Lipsky’s “*Dilemmas of the individual in public services*”, so the subtitle of his seminal book, occur due to unlimited demand for services while resources are limited, due to vague and unclear formal legislation (that sometimes even entails conflicting goals or that conflicts with agency objectives), and last but not least, due to bureaucratic rules that have to be mediated in the continuous and complex interaction with clients. For instance, SLB’s are required to provide a flexible and responsive service attentive to individual needs while being bound by the impersonal bureaucratic rules of the organization they work in. According to Lipsky, this results in dilemmas that manifest themselves in the interaction with users. The adaptation to these different pressures happens through discretion exercised by the SLBs to organize their work, for instance, through “rationing” services (through limiting access and demand, by controlling clients or by maximizing the use of existing resources). For Lipsky, the behavior of street-level bureaucrats is limited by the legal context, the organizational apparatus, and the organizational resources which reconfigure the actions of SLBs. The SLB perspective has received wide attention from public policy and administration scholars and has altered thinking about bureaucracy in these disciplines. As Brodtkin puts it, this perspective requires to abandon “normative assumptions that tend to be built into most implementation and management studies, specifically, the assumption that SLOs should “follow the law” (the Weberian model) or operate as “agents of the state” (the principal-agent model)” (Brodtkin 2016: 446). Brodtkin describes these models as “deviance models” as here, SLB’s discretion constitutes either deviance from rule-bound bureaucracy or from imperfect incentive structures of contracts between principal and agent. In this “deviance-model view”, discretion is seen as malicious sabotage of the formal policy goals or resistance against the hierarchical control that implicitly should be reduced. SLB’s discretion and interpretation of policy directives are seen as impediments for an otherwise “rational” policy program.

In contrast to the deviance model, Lipsky (and his followers) make clear that discretion is not necessarily an expression of a deliberate intention of frontline professionals to jeopardize the policy goals as formulated by upper-level managers. The discretionary derogation from formulated rules and prescriptions results – among others – from the fact that policy programs are far from unambiguously designed and seldom contain straightforward and clear goals. As Brodtkin describes, the need for discretion is already enshrined in policy design: “policymaking often takes place in a context that makes compromise, obfuscation and internal inconsistency strategically useful in securing legislative agreement” (Brodtkin 2013: 21). According to Brodtkin, policies themselves can have contradicting, multiple goals

related to different interest groups and stakeholders that impact on the formulation of policy. Secondly, and most importantly, in some areas of policy (especially, but not only, a policy involving human services), “implementation either requires or allows discretion, infusing formal policy with considerable operational uncertainty” (Brodkin 2013: 22). Insofar policies are imbued with uncertainties, conflicting goals and a considerable room for discretion, professional discretion has not to be seen as a threat to program integrity but is inherent and ubiquitous part of policy implementation.

#### 4.1.1. Overcoming the Implementation-Control-Discretion-Narrative

While the street-level bureaucracy debate has provided an important stimulus for administration research, it also comes with some weaknesses that are well reflected in recent scholarship on SLB. These weaknesses include the implicit rational-choice institutionalism that comes with some of the SLB-literature. According to SLB-theory, frontline agents react rationally to the (overt and covert) institutional incentives. One the one side, such a perspective depicts welfare professionals as utility-maximizing, rational actors that exercise discretion in order to minimize the costs that come with the unpleasant aspects of their work. The rational choice aspect of SLB is for instance reflected in Brodkin’s “street-level calculus of choice” (Brodkin 2016: 447). Focusing on the structure of street-level work (for instance resources, demand, infrastructure, incentives) street-level theory assesses how these conditions produce specific patterns of discretion. As Brodkin writes, “according to this calculus, one can assume that caseworkers will select action A over B when A is less costly and more rewarding. It follows that management strategies that change the informal calculus of costs and benefits will result in different patterns of discretionary choice” (Brodkin 2011: 259). In doing so, SLB-research treats discretionary decision-making as the dependent variable that is influenced by specific organizational incentive structures (the independent variable). Just like in principal agent-theory, discretion results from wrongly designed incentive structures. In such a view, discretion has an openly negative connotation (e.g. shirking or creaming) and is seen as something that must be minimized. Welfare professionals are in this view – “condemned as either lazy or anti-state” (Maynard-Moody/Musheno 2012: 520). At best, “discretion” is seen as a necessary evil as formal law may grant it to apply general rules to complex cases. Similarly, Rice (2013) argues that Lipsky’s approach remains too strongly seated within the toolkit of rational choice institutionalism, in which the behavior of SLB’s is influenced by an “organizational context that sets the goals, rules, budgetary and time resources for bureaucratic action and second, the intrinsic cognitive-emotional utility functions of individual street-level bureaucrats which, in interplay with the organizational context, will determine whether street-level bureaucrats rigorously apply, creatively adapt, or undermine

formal policy goals in their interaction with clients and client groups” (Rice 2013: 2). SLBs discretionary behavior is seen as a rational adaptation to organizational incentives for potentially hazardous deviance from an otherwise superior technical-bureaucratic rationality. This is also exemplified by Brodtkin’s quote, arguing that the practical payoff of the SLB-approach is the identification of the conditions that influence discretion in order to “identify effective levers for changing street-level practices [...] In contrast to other approaches that focus on changing individuals, this approach targets structural conditions that managers and policy makers could plausibly (if not easily) affect” (Brodtkin 2016: 446). In effect, SLB-research has been particularly powerful at uncovering the informal adaptation of SLB’s to performance management tools and has demonstrated how these provide incentives to “make the numbers” through cherry-picking, creaming or short-changing their clients. Such a perspective considers the frontline level as a potential factor of interference with top-down policy goals – street-level organizations are conceptualized one-dimensionally as agents of the state responsible for policy execution. As will be shown in the next chapter, this view conflicts with findings from research on implementation and organizations. Welfare professionals do not simply utilize discretion to subvert or bend formal rules. Rather, they base their judgments on normative rules of appropriateness and of moral deservingness, which reflect wider beliefs held in society. Rice proposes to combine Lipsky’s approach with sociological institutionalism, in order to “conceptually embed individual caseworker actions in a wider web of economic, political, cultural, and social structures” (Rice 2013: 4).

Secondly, SLBs rational choice institutionalism relates to a binary distinction between rule-based implementation and street-level discretion. As such, bureaucratic rules and hierarchical prescriptions may be important, but by far not the only structural constraint for SLBs. The “implementation-control-discretion-narrative” (Maynard-Moody/Musheno 2012: 519) inherent in SLB-theory operates with an idea of hierarchical-bureaucratic relations as the sole contextual element that urges SLB’s to use discretion. This results in a binary distinction between rule-based implementation and street-level discretion that is a remnant of the roots of SLB-theory in administration and policy studies. As Maynard-Moody and Portillo describe, “structure is more than a place on the organizational chart and in the web of authority relations” (Maynard-Moody/Portillo 2010: 12). In this vein, recent developments in SLB-theory attempt to overcome this duality through working with more elaborated concepts of “agency in structure rather than discretion” (*ibid.*). As Maynard-Moody and Musheno put it programmatically, the street-level bureaucracy approach must go “beyond the implementation-control-discretion-narrative” (Maynard-Moody/Musheno 2012: 517). Drawing on Sewell and Giddens theory of agency, these authors argue that (organizational) structures should not be viewed as the antipode of discretionary decision-making but that structures



(such as laws, budgets and rules, practices, routines) “are the core of resources that make up, with schemas, the nature of structure and give meaning to human agency” (Maynard-Moody/Musheno 2012: 520). As such, discretion is not the counterpoint of “rules” – but it is rules (and other structures) that give sense to and legitimize specific practices or actions of SLBs. Based on findings from their own empirical research, Maynard Moody and Musheno open SLB-research to a more multidimensional makeup of the organizational context of institutional work. They show that street-level agents legitimize decisions by recurring to widely held (and often taken-for-granted) social norms and judgments about deservingness, that they “use” rather than “follow” rules, and even develop stable informal rules and routines in the absence of bureaucratic control (Maynard-Moody/Musheno 2000, 2003, 2012). Maynard-Moody and Musheno are thus highly critical of a view that sees discretion as a rational adaptation to institutional incentives and in where it constitutes derision from bureaucratic technological rationality. As they put it,

“the exercise of discretion exists in the context of social relations, not, as the state-agent narrative emphasizes, in the context of the abstract, formal, and hierarchical duties and responsibilities as defined by law and policy. Street-level workers do occupy specific roles in the formal hierarchy and this profoundly shapes their institutional culture, but their decisions and actions are guided by meaning, not a function” (Maynard-Moody/Musheno 2000: 253)

In such a perspective, future SLB-research thus needs to focus on the “pragmatic improvisation as an expression within the context of rules, practices, and roles” (ibid: 520). Rather than utilizing “conventional and simplistic notions of hierarchical rationality” (Maynard Moody/Portillo 2011: 254). As most of previous research operates with a “false distinction prevalent to date between street-level discretion and rule-based implementation” (ibid.: 271), future research should focus “on how discretion is nested within the context of routines, practice ideologies, rule-following, and law” (ibid.).

#### 4.1.2. From Street-level Bureaucrats to Human Service Organizations

The newer works in the tradition of SLB-Theory (e.g. Brodtkin 2011, 2013, Hupe 2019) have pushed forward a perspective on policy implementation that, while remaining true to its roots in the discipline of administrative and political sciences, has yielded important insights in the implementation of policies and the ambiguities in the formulation of explicit policies. As described above, this strand of research has been criticized in three central points: Firstly, the inherent rational choice institutionalism leaving us with an undercomplex operationalization of institutional structure and human agency of SLBs. Structure is more than the hierarchical work structure, bureaucratic rules, and incentives, and agency is more than utility-maximization.

The departure from “function” to “meaning” (Maynard-Moody/Musheno 2000: 253), requires an analysis of the interpretative, situated application of bureaucratic rules and normative prescriptions more thoroughly. Secondly, while SLB-research has covered a wide array of different fields, ranging from the police to classical social work settings, it provides a rather restricted perspective on the specificities of different *types* of organizations. Their institutional environments, their “raw material” (Hasenfeld 2009) they process, as well as their specificities that result from the fact that they are “people processing” organizations are not sufficiently considered. Finally, in SLB-theory, the context of street-level work seems to be structured solely by a teleological model of bureaucratic rationality. The latter perspective has been criticized by scholars applying organizational theory to the analysis of human service organizations (Hasenfeld 1972, 2010) and educational organizations (Meyer/Rowan 2006). These accentuate the embeddedness of rational behavior within different institutional frameworks, highlighting the fact that both the “preferences” as well as the institutional arrangements that come with specific cost/benefit ratios are dependent on different institutional frameworks for action (Immergut 1998, Rowan 2006). Lipsky’s street-level bureaucrats “goal conflict” between service user-centered goals and organization-centered goals would – in such a perspective – have to be analysed as resulting from specific historically evolving institutions (for instance, a specific historically embedded professional ethos of serving one’s client on the one side and the institution of bureaucratic efficiency on the other). As DiMaggio and Powell argue

“The new institutionalism in organization theory and sociology comprises a rejection of rational-actor models, an interest in institutions as independent variables, a turn toward cognitive and cultural explanations, and an interest in properties of supra-individual units of analysis that cannot be reduced to aggregations or direct consequences of individuals’ attributes or motives” (ibid. 1991: 8).

The critiques pointed to street-level bureaucracy approaches, particularly their rootedness in an idea of technical rationality is also criticized by Garrow and Hasenfeld 2010. Although the following quote applies more generally to administration sciences, many of the named aspects apply to the same extent to parts of the SLB-literature:

“because it assumes a closed system, the multiple and changing influences of the environment are not addressed [...] It also fails to account for the influences of indeterminate technology, amorphous and conflicting goals, informal relations both among staff and between staff and clients and constraints on accountability and authority” (Garrow/Hasenfeld 2010: 34)

These shortcomings of the SLB-literature may be due to its focus on classical bureaucracies and its focus on a very large array of public services. As such, speci-

ficiencies of human service organizations may have been ignored in some cases. For Hasenfeld, strongly influenced by new-institutionalism and sociological organizational theory, the behavior of frontline staff must be regarded as a specific organizational behavior that is embedded within a specific institutional environment. Hasenfeld employs a simple analogy for describing the specificities in terms of "organizational technologies" of human service organizations. When compared with classical manufacturing organizations, HSO's have some specific characteristics that make them special kinds of organizations. Human service organizations, so it goes, are "distinguished by the fact that people are their raw material" (Hasenfeld 2009: 11) which means that "the work done on people under the jurisdiction of these organizations is work that aims at altering and reshaping their personal attributes" (ibid.). For Hasenfeld, it is the specific people transformation process to which people are subjected (and that defines them as the raw material of that organization) that differentiates them from other organizations. Consequently, a central analytical perspective of the HSO-perspective is the various ways "in which people served by human service organizations are [...] subjected to a process of sorting, classification and categorization, which define how they are going to be transformed" (ibid.). Human service organizations perform people processing, people sustaining and people changing activities (Hasenfeld 1972; Hasenfeld 1983), by utilizing different human service technologies, defined as "a set of institutionalized procedures aimed at changing the physical, psychological, social or cultural attributes of people in order to transform them from a given status to a new prescribed status" (Hasenfeld 1983: 11). The work performed in human service organizations is inherently moral work – the license human service organizations to transform persons from one status to another is linked to "institutionalized moral rules" (Hasenfeld 2009: 12) that define "what client attributes it can address and work on, in what matter and for what purposes" (ibid.). As such, human service organizations are strongly embedded in their organizational environment, as it is only through making references to "institutionalized moral systems in their environment" (Hasenfeld 2009: 14) that they can maintain legitimacy. Through their dependency on the institutional environment, human service organizations are exposed to turbulent institutional environments, composed of different interest groups and stakeholders. As such the goals and objectives of human service organizations are often multiple, sometimes contradictory, at least contested. Furthermore, the core activities of human service organizations are interactive client-worker relationships. This interactive work, in which organizational expectations must be transformed into addressable expectations is a highly insecure technology – that is "they generally lack certainty and predictability about the outcome of their application" (Hasenfeld 2009: 17). Human service organizations are thus characterized by a "technological deficit" (Baraldi/Corsi 2017: 94; Luhmann/Schorr 1979). This means that processes such as education, helping, healing, as technical problems of these organizations

cannot sufficiently be transposed into standardized and mechanical routines and methods – there exist no clear-cut means-end relations that would apply to each case and each situation. Due to this technological indeterminacy, service technologies can be termed at best “practice ideologies” (Hasenfeld 2009: 18), that make specific predicaments and assumptions about how to reach a goal, but that are inherently insecure. Because human service organizations are characterized by insecure technologies, they must be differentiated from types of organizations that dispose of clear technologies and means-end relations, (e.g. manufacturing organizations). For the latter, organizational survival mainly depends on efficiency: “when output can be easily evaluated [...] efficiency often determines success” (Meyer/Rowan: 1977: 354). For the former, this is not the case. This is described by Meyer and Rowan in their seminal text on institutionalised organizations. Meyer and Rowan describe a continuum along which organizations can be ordered: “at the one end are production organizations under strong output controls [...] whose success depends on the management of relational networks. At the other end are institutionalized organizations whose success depends on the confidence and stability achieved by isomorphism with institutional rules” (ibid.). Meyer and Rowan also point to the fact that it is not only the “technical properties of its output” (ibid) that defines whether an organization is an “institutionalized organization” or not. Even organizations with “secure” technologies and a less ambiguous technical core may be confronted with the need to respond to changes in their institutional environment that favor ceremonial institutional adaptation. Meyer and Rowan discovered that educational organizations do not operate according to formal, means-end rationality geared towards efficiency as advocated by the contemporary organizational theory. Rather, “educational organizations were [...] seen as captive (i.e. nonmarket) organizations passively conforming to broader (and already institutionalized) forces, securing success through processes of institutional conformity as opposed to technical efficiency” (Meyer/Rowan 2006: 3). The survival of such organizations thus depends less on the technical proficiency of their work “and more on their conformity with dominant cultural symbols and belief systems, that is institutional rules” (Meyer/Rowan 1977: 14). According to Hasenfeld, HSO’s are “archetypically institutionalized” (Hasenfeld 2009: 14) as their growth and survival largely depends on the extent that they uphold cultural frames that resonate well with their significant audiences, such as “legislative bodies, government bureaucracies, regulatory agencies, professional associations, other human service organizations various civic and political associations, and clients” (ibid.: 9). The fact that HSO’s are invariably confronted with interactions as their core operations and thus dependent on client-worker relationships to do their work (Hasenfeld 2009: 22) clearly puts them in the field of institutionalized organizations. For these kinds of organizations, a high interdependence with their institutionalized environment must be anticipated: “compliance with state policies and regulation provides the legal

foundation for the organization's existence and is a prerequisite for the attainment of public funds" (Hasenfeld 2010: 9). As HSO's depend on their institutional environment for their survival, they must (at least ceremonially) comply with institutionalized rules. This applies particularly to those organizations that operate with uncertain technologies: "The more uncertain the relationship between means and ends the greater the extent to which an organization will model itself after organizations it perceives to be successful" (DiMaggio/Powell 1984: 154).

#### **4.1.3. Human Service Organizations and their Institutionalized Environments**

The impact of institutionalized environments can be exemplified by the example of the Motivational Semesters. The new-institutional theory posits that organizational change is not intricably linked to a rational adaptation of internal processes towards means-end rationality, but that it comes from isomorphic adaptation to an organizational environment that provides legitimacy. Starting from this postulate, DiMaggio and Powell argue that organizations of the same institutional field will resemble each other and that organizations will model their formal structure to those organizations that they perceive to be successful. They also assume that organizations will adapt their formal structure to such organizations with whom they maintain exchange relations or on which they are dependent for their survival: "the greater the dependence of an organization on another organization, the more similar it will become to that organization in structure, climate and behavior" (Di Maggio/Powell 1984). This can also be observed in the case of the Motivational Semesters.

#### **4.1.4. (De-)coupling and Organizational Fields**

Meyer and Rowan developed their theory through empirical research on educational organizations. This is of interest to us, as they share many characteristics with human service organizations. Their main argument was that educational organizations are institutionalized organizations, as their organizational form is maintained through isomorphy with institutional rules, dominant cultural symbols shared meanings and belief systems and not technical efficiency and effectivity. Formal structures are as such not determined through their demands in efficiency deriving from a specific technical core, (or through a value that would be determined through market-mechanisms) but gain their legitimacy through compliance and adaptation with institutionalized myths in the institutional environment of an organization. The notion of "institutional field" (Rowan 1982) is crucial here, as it defines "those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product

consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products” (DiMaggio/Powell 1983: 64). The formal structure of schools, but also human service organizations are influenced through professional and administrative interest groups, legal definitions of need, merit and mandate, other organizations in their field and other relevant stakeholders. Organizations derive their legitimacy through their adaptation to institutional environments. This can have problematic effects for organizations, especially for those for which success depends primarily on isomorphism with institutional rules. Meyer and Rowan identify two ideal typical constraints that can arise from institutionalized organizations. First, expectations from different units from the organizational environment can conflict with one another: “because these ceremonial rules are transmitted by myths that may arise from different parts of the environment, the rules may conflict with one another” (Meyer/Rowan 1972: 355). Secondly, the taking over of institutional rules from the environment can conflict with the task-related and technological tasks to be performed by the organization. In Meyer and Rowan’s Words: “technical activities and demands for efficiency create conflicts and inconsistencies in an institutionalized organization’s effort to conform to the ceremonial rules of production” (Meyer/Rowan 1972: 355). Such conflicts can be identified for the Motivational Semesters. Welfare workers are supposed to enforce strict sanctioning rules in order to comply with the standards of the funding organization (the logistic office of the unemployment office). These usually entail sanctions for being too late or for specific behavioral demands that a young person must fulfill. This ceremonial rule stands in conflict with the need to consider the vulnerability of specific youngsters and their rootedness in specific youth-related temporalities from which derives an inability to instantaneously comply with the strict standards. To be “successful” and to slowly guide the youngsters towards a life-conduct compatible with the “world of work”, welfare workers must handle the sanctioning criteria carefully, considering the individual life-situation and the specific “reasons” for being too late. This conflicts with a one size fits all, consequentialist interpretation of the legal requirement of equal treatment and the rejection of favoritism. Nevertheless, the need to account for the “close” attachments of persons, their embeddedness in life-worlds and time-horizons often lacking what is required in the world of work makes it necessary to flexibly respond to the variations of the population that enters the measure. On the one side, the logic of sanctions seems to conflict with an idea of relationship building, requiring confidence and the temporary suspension of the standardized legal-rational logic of sanction. In Meyer and Rowan’s own words, this is a conflict between categorical rules and efficiency: “because standardized ceremonial categories must confront variations and anomalies, the generalized rules of the institutional environment are often inappropriate to specific situations. A governmentally mandated curriculum may be inappropriate for the students at

hand" (Meyer/Rowan 1977: 355). Secondly, the Organization of the SeMo entails a conflict that emerges from expectations different units from the organizational environment: The funding institution with the strong sanctioning criteria on the one side, and the group of "welfare professionals", that partly endorse a strong ethical and advocacy stance towards their population, reject strict sanctioning criteria and display strong preferences for a holistic, dialogical and non-punitive orientation on the other. Their self-understanding as professional educational staff leaves them at unease with the administrative criteria of sanctioning.

According to new institutionalist theory, de-coupling between formal structure and the level of activities and a "loose coupling" of different units of the organization can provide a solution for the dilemma to maintain legitimacy when confronted with a turbulent organizational environment on the one side, and to provide the necessary discretion for the sub-units for the fulfilment of tasks on the other side. The observation of loose coupling is a core theoretical concept in the new-institutionalist theory. Meyer and Rowan analyzed schools as "loosely coupled" systems to designate the fact that the technical core of schooling (teaching) is separated and only weakly coordinated with the administrative field of the school. For Meyer and Rowan, this "loose coupling" stems from the inability of the school to control the effects of schooling and to compensate insecurity in outcomes and the incapacity to prognosticate the results of the own technologies. They "buffer" these inconsistencies through a process that early new institutionalist theories termed, in reference to Weick's (1967) concepts of "loose-coupling" and "decoupling":

"Institutional organizations protect their formal structures from evaluation on the basis of technical performance: Inspection, evaluation, and control of activities are minimized, and coordination, interdependence and mutual adjustment among structural units are handled informally" (1977: 357).

Meyer and Rowan describe for instance that the delegation of activities to "professionals" (as for instance teachers and welfare professionals) is a characteristic example of "decoupling", as professionals usually perform their tasks beyond the direct purview of managers and output controls. As such, human service organizations are a prime example of institutionalized organizations. Firstly, their core operations are mediated through client worker relations and interactions which are particularly prone to technological indeterminacy. Secondly, the fact that "interactions" are their core operations provides a good premise for de-coupling between formal structure and the level of activity. As described in the case of the Motivational Semester, such systems of interaction can provide a margin of maneuver for the professionals that allow them to respond to each person individually and to motivate them to participate in the co-production of a service. This results in possible conflicts with other parts of their institutional environment (for instance, strict compliance with state policies and regulations). Processual demands emerg-

ing from the direct work activities are decoupled from the administrative sector of an organization. Another organizational strategy for “decoupling” is to keep the goal of organizations ambiguous and open to interpretation, to avoid exact goal definitions and to maintain overview and control of organizational activities minimalist and ritualized. Often, categorical ends are substituted by technical ends (see e.g. Meyer/Rowan 1977: 357): “Hospitals treat, not cure, schools produce students, not learning. In fact, data on technical performance are eliminated or rendered invisible – public services avoid data on effectiveness, and schools deemphasize measures of achievement”. In analogy, Motivational Semester do not produce labor-market positions but produce persons with the right dispositions to potentially enter the labor market. They produce clients with a “will to a will” (Andersen 2007), not jobs.

#### 4.1.5. From Organizational Fields to Contradictory Institutional Logics

Early new institutionalists distinction between institutionalized organizations (that is, (nonmarket) organizations passively conforming to broader (and already institutionalized) forces) and organizations that secure success through technical efficiency and market exchange has received some critique and has been reformulated by key proponents of new institutionalist Theories (Meyer/Rowan 2006: 7-8). Rowan highlights that it is a common misunderstanding that new institutionalism solely focusses on myths and ceremonial adaptations of organizations as a response to structures of control and regulation. For Rowan, new institutionalism “simply calls analysts’ attention to the many ways control systems can be organized, for example, variation in the number agencies exercising control, the consistency of these controls, the extent to which the controls are clearly specified, and the presence or absence of sanctions for deviance” (Rowan 2006: 25). Consequently, the notion of de-coupling must be relativized and the possibility of different forms (lose or strong) of coupling with institutional environments should be considered. Secondly, the distinction between institutionalized organizations and technical organizations operating in markets, primarily relying on efficiency for their coupling with their environment is partly revoked. The latter are- so the arguments goes – equally composed of an institutional environment that may require institutionalized adaptation: “The fact that institutional processes penetrate, and shape economic relations further implies the obsolescence of the identification of “institutional with non-profit and technical with for-profit organizations” (Powell/DiMaggio 1991: 32). Market-related demands for efficiency cannot be understood to stand outside socially constructed and institutionally constituted order. The distinction between environments that are technologically structured and those that are institutionally structured becomes obsolete in cases in which administrations and welfare organizations become subjected by new-



public management mechanisms or must sell their “goods” on a “quasi-market”. Similarly, Meyer and Scott (1991) suggest that although all organizations are shaped by both technical and institutional forces, some types of organizations are more subject to one of the two forces.

Albeit the notion of decoupling and the distinction between institutionalized and market organizations relying on technical efficiency is obsolete, it is important to highlight the high heuristic value of the concept of “organizational field” as institutional environments for organizations. In the earliest definition, organizational fields describe “those organizations that, “in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products” (DiMaggio/Powell 1991 [1983]: 64). Organizational activities are co-determined, controlled and standardized through other organizational entities in the field. Scott and Meyer (1983) called attention to the ways in which field complexity affects organizational structure. Going beyond DiMaggio’s and Powell’s focus on field homogeneity resulting from isomorphy, Scott stressed the fact that the field surrounding organizations are themselves organized in different ways that influence the structure of the organizations embedded within them. Organizational fields can thus have considerable heterogeneity, many organizational fields are characterized by “two or more strong, competing or conflicting belief systems” (Scott/Meyer 1994: 211). For human service organizations being part of the welfare state infrastructure, this entails a large influence of political organizations, public administration but also professional organizations and ideologies. In addition, their institutional environment is made up of non-institutionalized entities more concretely, persons as their “raw material” to be processed. The further development of the notion of an organizational field builds on the initial definition of DiMaggio and Powell but gives it a turn. For instance, Rowan (2006: 28) describes that the assumed tendency of organizations within a field to become more and more homogenous due to processes of isomorphism may have missed an important fact. The fact that “organizations in an institutional sector take on different forms—they adopt different structures, pursue different clients, market marginally different product mixes, and so on, largely because of their shared positions within the sector” (ibid.) shows that within the same institutional field, organizations may take different forms. Against the hypothesis of isomorphy, the interaction between fields and organizations do not seem to operate in a top-down, unilateral manner. Also, does the general hypothesis of institutional isomorphy tell us little about processes of change, the disruption of fields, and the underlying processes in which new logics become institutionalized? As Lisa Knoll (2008) writes, DiMaggio and Powell’s initial proposition thus seems to lack a description of those micro-processes through which institutional patterns find diffusion within organizations (see e.g. Zucker 1991, Powell/Colyvas 2008, see also Knoll 2012). To account

for the lacking micro foundation of the new institutionalist theory some authors developed theories of “institutional entrepreneurship”<sup>1</sup> (Di Maggio 1988, Battiliana 2009) or “institutional work”, (Lawrence 2009). However, the theoretical figure of an “institutional entrepreneur” alleges that organizational change is planned and implemented by a single key actor and imposed in a top-down approach. As Knoll (2012: 56) writes, this represents “a rather unconvincing conception of agency as the rationally calculating actor that implements institutional innovation from above and social agents, that reproduce structure from below stand side by side without any mediation”. Knoll criticizes that the explanation of social change through the will of a mighty actor or the figure of an institutional entrepreneur falls short of the mark.

The idea of an institutional entrepreneur thus represents no real solution to the mediation of (institutionalized) structure and (human) agency. Powell and Calyvas point to the fact that it is wrong to see macro-factors like for instance, institutions as only re-inforcing stability and homogeneity, and associating micro-factors with entrepreneurship and agency: “individuals also play a powerful role in maintaining the social order” (ibid.). Accordingly, as they put it, “the individuals that presently populate institutional analysis are portrayed as either “cultural dopes” (Garfinkel, 1967: 68-75) or heroic “change agents” (Strang/Sine, 2002: 503-07). The move to consider institutional entrepreneurs seemed to be motivated by a desire of new-institutionalist scholars to replace the over-socialized individuals who seemed slavishly devoted to habit and fashion. But the celebration of entrepreneurs “has perhaps gone too far, as not all change is led by entrepreneurs, and surely heroic actors and cultural dopes are a poor representation of the gamut of human behavior” (Powell/Colyvas 2008: 277). Consequently, Powell and Colyvas (2008) contend that institutional analysis needs to focus “attention to everyday processes than momentous events, to less powerful members of organizations as opposed to only leaders or champions, and to cultural and cognitive aspects as well as political ones” (ibid.). In their attempt to deal with institutional change and the impact of pluralistic institutional environments, the new institutionalist theory seems caught in two contradictory positions. The idea of “institutional entrepreneurs” (Di Maggio 1988) seems to heavily rely on explaining institutional change by recourse to the power of will and the agency of few, while on the other side, concepts of isomorphy and classical models of institutional theory rely on a conception of unquestioned and consistent enforcement of institutional patterns. It does, however not provide

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1 This strong focus on the agency of institutional entrepreneurs is for instance enshrined in this quote: “New institutions arise when organized actors with sufficient resources see in them an opportunity to realize interests that they value highly...[Institutional entrepreneurs] create a whole new system of meaning that ties the functioning of disparate sets of institutions together” (DiMaggio 1988: 14).

a sound conception of the connection between agency and strategic action on the one side and organizational and institutional environments on the other, nor does it give an in-depth description of how stability is maintained by actors within different, sometimes inconsistent prescriptions resulting from heterogeneity of the organizational field or the rivalry of different “belief systems” (Scott 2001).

Nevertheless, within the institutional theory, different attempts to integrate both behaviors of institutional actors, on the one side, and the existence of different, sometimes competing belief systems exist. Friedland and Alford (1991) locate their theory of “institutional logics” as an attempt to overcome explanations building on utilitarian-individual premises on the one side and power-oriented organizational premises on the other. They place their theory on the middle ground, between voluntarist approaches (amongst which they place both conceptions of the utility-maximizing actor accounts and symbolic interactionism) and organization approaches (under which they place approaches to operate with disembodied concepts of power):

“Theories that make individuals primary tend, at the extreme, to become open-ended, solipsistic, and voluntarist approaches in which the entire world is renegotiated in every social interaction. They are excessively subjectivist or posit abstract conceptions of human “nature” which are invariant across time and space-like utility maximization. Theories that make organizations central tend either to overstate an omnipresent, disembodied power which enables elites to discipline and punish without resistance, or to assume that they have the extraordinary latitude to make strategic choices determined only by their access to material resources” (Friedland/Alford 1991: 241).

While this approach shares with DiMaggio and Powell (1983) the idea that cultural and cognitive structures shape action, it does not adhere to a strong idea of isomorphism, the latter implying that interests, identities, and meaning-making of actors can be ignored. Friedland and Alford reject both individualistic rational choice theories and macro structural Theories and advocate an approach of “embedded Agency” (Thornton/Occasio 2008: 104). While the former ignore that individual utilities are structured by institutions, the latter ignore that individuals “can manipulate or reinterpret symbolic practices” (Friedland/Alford 1991: 254). With Seo and Creed one could define Friedland’s and Alford’s conception of the Actor as a “partially autonomous actor situated in a contradictory social world” (Seo/Creed 2002: 230). For Alford and Friedland, Society must be conceptualized as an “interinstitutional system” (Thornton/Occasio 2008: 104), with different key institutions each operating with its own distinct logic. These central institutions – capitalist market, bureaucratic state, democracy, nuclear family, religions, “shape individual preferences and organizational interests as well as the repertoire of be-

haviors by which they may attain them. These institutions are potentially contradictory and hence make multiple logics available to individuals and organizations. Individuals and organizations transform the institutional relations of society by exploiting these contradictions” (Friedland/Alford 1991: 232). The authors stress the fact that institutions are also symbolic systems, thus “ways of ordering reality and thereby rendering experience of time and space meaningful” (Friedland/Alford 1991: 242-243). In such a conception of institutions, actors may act based on utility maximization or in strategic ways, while at the same time, the means and ends of their interests and agency are both enabled and constrained by prevailing institutional logics. For Friedland and Alford each of the distinct institutional orders of which the supra-organizational system is made up has a central logic that “provide(s) individuals with vocabularies of motives and with a sense of self. They generate not only that which is valued but the rules by which it is calibrated and distributed. Institutions set the limits on the very nature of rationality and, by implication, of individuality. Nonetheless, individuals, groups, and organizations try to use institutional orders to their own advantage” (Friedland/Alford 1991: 243). Friedland and Alford’s approach thus highlights how the cultural dimension of institutions both enable and constrain agency. With Ann Swidler one can conceive institutions as being a kind of repertoire, a “tool kit” (Swidler 1986) from which people construct strategies of action. Strategies are in turn made possible only through reference to specific vocabularies of motives: “culture independently influences action, but only by providing resources from which people can construct diverse lines of action” (Swidler 1986: 273). Friedland and Alford provide different examples of this fact. They highlight the “critical activity” of actors in manipulating and contesting the behavioral and meaning related implications and show that they can carry multiple meanings or motivation (see e.g. Friedland/Alford 1991: 251). They give the example of the decision to vote, that can convey – at the level of individual analysis “membership in a national community, (democracy) an instrumental attempt to attain state benefits (market), a routine obligation of citizenship, (state) a belief in a particular ideology or worldview” (ibid.: 251). Nevertheless, it is mainly on the level of the supra-organizational system of different institutional logics that contradictions and conflicts between different logics emerge. The role of contradictions between institutional logic is of crucial importance for understanding institutional change: “institutional contradictions are the bases of the most important political conflicts in our society. It is through these politics that the institutional structure of society is transformed” (Alford/Friedland 1991: 257). The authors give a range of examples that show that central struggles of today’s society are in fact “struggles over the appropriate relationships between institutions, and by which institutional logic different activities should be regulated and to which categories of persons they apply” (ibid.). For instance, the question if access to housing be regulated by the market or by the state, the question if education should be controlled by

families, churches, or states, or the question of rights of citizenship apply to the economy or those of the market apply to the state are examples that prove the existence of struggles between groups that refer to the contradictions of different institutional logics. For instance, Friedland and Alford also describe the struggle of workers in capitalist societies for the extension of "citizenship" rights of due process and even participation to the employment relation in private firms as a struggle between different institutional logics: "Workers attempt to redefine the social relations of production as defined by democratic rights of citizenship rather than contractual property rights" (ibid.). This constitutes a conflict between institutional logics in which actors, through referring to institutional patterns, their categories and vocabularies of motives transform the institutional contradictions at stake in one supraorganisational system. It is the potentially contradictory nature of these institutions that make multiple logics available to individuals and organizations. Contradictions between institutional logics, or as Seo and Creed put it, "multilevel, mutually incompatible institutional processes" (Seo/Creed 2002: 225) lead to the possibility of the transformation of present social arrangements. Actors can be seen as "active and artful exploiters of institutional contradictions" (ibid. 232). While Friedland and Alford clearly locate their theory of institutional logics in a supraorganisational field, later specifications of the "institutional logics" perspective (Thornton/Occasio 2008, 2012) have shown how this perspective can be applied to a variety of different levels, for instance, organizations, groups, industries, and organizations. The most important implication, though, is the switch from homogeneity in organizational fields in early new institutionalism towards a macro-micro linking theory of structural inconsistencies between different institutional logics that can also find reflection within different organizational settings: "rather than positing homogeneity and isomorphism in organizational fields, the institutional logics approach views any context as potentially influenced by contending logics of different societal sectors" (Thornton/Occasio 2008: 104). Thornton and Occasio review several studies that harness the theory of institutional logics for the analysis of different organizational fields. They quote Scott et al.'s analysis of the health care field in California that is "shaped by the institutional logic of the market, the logic of the democratic state, and the professional logic of medical care" (Scott/Martin/Mendel/Caronna 2000). Scott et. al. describe how competing institutional logics lead to a change in a sector initially dominated by the medical professions towards a greater influence of the logic of the state and the market. Similarly, Reay and Hingis (2009) in their analysis of the Canadian healthcare system, analyze how actors manage the rivalry of coexisting and competing institutional logics in their day-to-day work activities. An important insight of these studies is that one logic did not over roll another logic once and for all, but that two or more different logics can exist side, by provoking potentially conflicting, countervailing or stabilizing tensions.

#### 4.1.6. From Institutional Logics to Competing Orders of Worth: The Sociology of Conventions

Despite the strong drive of the institutional logics literature to develop a theoretical framework that integrates at the same time supraorganizational logics and human agency, most research conducted within the institutional logics framework remains on the level of sectors, organizational fields or specific subpopulations of organizations. The current work highlights the need for analyzing the role of competing logics and rationalities at the frontline level of organizations of welfare state, and more particularly, the ways in which human agents ignore, comply, resist and or compromise different institutional logics. For doing so a third theoretical approach to the analysis of organizations will be presented, which allows better integration of the situated and localized arrangement of compromises between different institutional logics. In addition, several authors point to continuities and similarities between a conception of "institutional logics" and the approach to be presented within the next pages, that is the "economy of conventions", particularly when it comes to the analysis of organizations (Thornton/Ocasio 2008: 102; Cloutier/Langley 2012; Jagd 2012) and professional practices. This framework of the "economy of conventions" is usually described as "French pragmatic sociology" (Jagd 2012, Bénatouïl 1999) and is strongly connected with the scholarship of Luc Boltanski, Laurent Thévenot, Francois Eymard-Duvernay and others. While the economy of conventions has its roots in economic sociology and is initially born from a diagnosis of problems associated with the application of the theoretical frame of neoclassical economics to economic actions that cannot be restricted to pure competitive markets (Dupuy/Eymard-Duvernay/Favreau/Orléan/Salais/Thévenot 1989), it has evolved to an overarching school of thought in French sociology. Initially, the approach highlighted the role of conventions as a non-economic form of coordination that is ignored by neoclassical economics through reducing a market exchange relationship between two persons to the form of a contract (ibid.: 141). Subsequently, conventionalists extended their analysis to the qualification of labor through the application of laws, rules norms and conventions (Salais/Thévenot 1986), the study of different forms of evaluation in recruitment decisions (Eymard-Duvernay 2008) or non-market criteria as quality conventions in production firms (Eymard-Duvernay 1994) and different world of production (Storper/Salais 1997). As an overarching school of thought, the "economy of conventions" attempted to combine three aspects that have been dissociated in the disciplines of economics and sociology: "the characterization of the agent and his/her reasons for acting, the modalities of coordination of actions, and the role of values and common goods" (Eymard-Duvernay/Favreau/Orléan/Salais/Thévenot 2003). Since the early beginnings of convention theory, Researchers in the economy of conventions have worked in different fields, elaborating on different tracks

of conventions in social and economic life. My further elaborations will focus on a specific track of the development of conventions theory, more precisely the part associated with the pragmatic sociology of critique developed by Boltanski and Thévenot at the Political and Moral Sociology Group of the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in the 1980s and 1990s, their central publication “On Justification. Economies of worth” and more recently further developments by Laurent Thévenot that highlight the usefulness of the framework for the analysis of organizational modes of coordination (Thévenot 2001, 2007).

In the 1990s, Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, both disciples of Pierre Bourdieu, develop a sociology that accounts for the reflexive, everyday critiques of laypersons and non-specialists. Their model rejects explanations that reduce social relations to relations of power and reduce agent’s actions to the internalization and incorporation of dominant norms, and that also differs from explanations that explain action through recourse to strategic action (e.g. rational choice theory). They thus depart from Bourdieu’s critical sociology that is seen as giving too much weight to the dispositional properties of actors compared to the properties inscribed in the situation in which the actors find themselves (see e.g. Boltanski 2009: 20). As such, Boltanski and Thévenot’s goal was to provide “an instrument with which to analyse the operations persons perform when they resort to criticism, when they have to justify the criticisms they produce, when they justify themselves in the face of criticism or collaborate in the pursuit of a justified agreement” (Boltanski/Thévenot: 2000: 208). Thévenot describes his analytical stance as “perpendicular” to the one of Pierre Bourdieu:

“Instead of being endowed with permanent dispositions actualized in different situations, the same persons are induced to change in accordance with the way situations are disposed and the way conducts are judged. This move brings more than a change in roles or social norms. It leads to a complete transformation in ways of experiencing the world. The shift among the plurality of orders of worth is the reason for the actor’s ability to criticize one from the viewpoint of the other, but also to compromise between them” (Thévenot 2008: 5).

In this quote the capacity of actors to judge the appropriateness of conventions and to switch between them in situ is highlighted. It is important to state that Boltanski and Thévenot do neither posit an unrestricted “critical capacity” of actors nor do they extend their model to all existing situations of the social world. Firstly, they restrict their model to such situations “that are submitted to the imperative of justification” (Boltanski/Thévenot 2000: 209) and thus exclude situations in which persons impose their positions by relying on the implicit or explicit threat of

violence, or those situations that are characterized by peaceful coexistence<sup>2</sup>. Secondly, persons are not infinitely free in their "critical capacity" but are exposed to situated constraints that limit the possibilities of action available to persons when they enter the regime of justifiable action. These situated constraints refer to specific "moral grammars", or in the words of Boltanski and Chiapello (2007), "orders of worth", or different "polities"<sup>3</sup> (Boltanski/Thévenot 2006, *passim*). For Boltanski and Thévenot, constraints of actions are associated with the arrangement of the situation in which the persons are placed. In situations of dispute, in which the imperative of justification and the possibility of critique are given, actors cannot resort to arbitrary arguments but must recur to common higher principles. In order to reach an agreement in situations of dispute, one "must be capable of justifying oneself by referring to a principle that is valid for all" (Boltanski/Thévenot 2000: 212). These higher-order principles, or "polities" spell out the "requirements that must be met by a higher common principle in order to support justifications" (Boltanski/Chiapello 2009: 19). The framework of conventions establishes that situations requiring justification are not predetermined but characterized by constitutive uncertainty and fragility and that the "states of worth" are actively constructed. As such, Boltanski and Thévenot argue, these characteristics place their approach close to the endeavors of "phenomenological sociologies who also pay much attention to the performative activities of the actors" (2001: 212). Just like approaches of interactionist sociology, for instance the concept of "negotiated order" (Strauss 1978) or the concepts of "ethnomethods" of ordinary actors in ethnomethodology, convention theory highlights that social order is negotiated and that situations are inherently insecure. The sociology of conventions thus shares with ethnomethodology a focus on the situation as the ontological place in which social order is negotiated and on the pragmatics of coordination in contingent, insecure processes "in action". Nevertheless, the sociology of conventions departs in some central points from such a perspective. Ethnomethodologists assume that in interactional turn-taking, actors mutually construct the meaningful orderliness of social situations and that therefore, social order only exists in terms of its situated re-actualization

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2 In fact, Boltanski (1990 (2012) develops a Theory of different action regimes, where the distinction between equivalence/non equivalence (comparability) and the distinction between peace/dispute present four possible Ideal types. The regime of "*paix en justesse*" would correspond to routine action, without conflict, where nevertheless the equivalence of people plays a role, the regime of "*paix en amour*" where one gives without counting, even whilst people are not searching for "equivalence"- ("care" would be a good example), the regime of "*dispute In violence*" where no equivalence between persons is posited, legitimating a "violent" enforcement, and the "*disputes in justice*" where actors are considered equally able to present their arguments and as such are submitted to the imperative of justification.

3 These terms are used inter-alia.



of this order through actors. To do so, actors are using “accounts” to signify, describe and explain the properties of a social situation to their counterpart. Through “ethnomethods” that rely on inherent capacities of actors, actors produce “minimal reciprocal understanding” (Dodier 2010: (16)). This “understanding” is described as “minimal” as the means and capacities for coordination are rooted in the persons themselves – they acquire the “ethnomethods” required for coordination through the acquisition of language and are as such (sub-consciously, non-reflexively) inscribed in their action programs. As Dodier writes, for ethnomethodology “the external level of convention-based action supports does not appear in the situation, and the active conventions are never given before the situation in question but are [...] generated in the process of interaction” ((Dodier 2010: (18), own translation). While ethnomethodology recognizes the existence of common rules, norms, and principles, the latter are only activated by competent members for practical reasons that are strictly to be found in the situation at stake. For the sociology of conventions – the means of coordination are rooted in the world (external to the situation) through external carriers and have not only to do with the properties of the situation. As Dodier writes, “the common fundament for coordination is not only inscribed into persons but also stored in books, dispositives, institutions, deposited in representatives and repetitively re-enacted in justice-oriented disputes and the construction of compromises” (Dodier 2010: (19)). As such, the sociology of conventions starts from the premise that coordination is not only rooted in the properties of the situation – but that – at least in some situations, actors are bound to specific pragmatic requirements that are referring to higher-order justice-related principles. Similar than in ethnomethodology, actors must perform, in each situation-specific acts of situated translation and application of these norms, other than in ethnomethodology, these judgments do happen with more reflexive consciousness and can claim more than “ad-hoc”-validity, as they have to consider the justice-oriented requirements of the conventionalized supports of action. For Dodier, this results in a different architecture of forms of coordination. In the “minimalist” form of coordination (as described in reference to ethnomethodology as situated communication) coordination proceeds more or less unconsciously, and covers basically all forms of human interaction. The “maximalist” form (as described by the sociology of conventions) in turn, refers to higher-order principles and requires judgment, arguments, and (reflexive) Justification. The latter form of coordination is not relevant for all situations and only refers to those situations that are submitted to an imperative of justification, situations of dispute, when many perspectives clash around a contested social reality, and in which persons are concerned by a sense of justice. As such, Boltanski’s ambition is “to reconstruct a ‘grammar’ of action in the making – that is, to develop a ‘model’ of normative requirements that action has to satisfy, and of structural constraints that action has to be able to

confront, in order to be approved or in order to become what it is intended to be” (Queré/Terzi 2014: 93)

Unlike the strict situationism of symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology, which excludes by methodological decision no resources external to the situation, the orders of worth model aim to account for the common resources to which actors appeal that go beyond the situation. These common resources are seen as central for the provision of a grammar that allows adequate action: “the resorting to principles of construction that transcend the situation enables the identification of the situations and the selection of arguments and moves that are relevant” (Boltanski/Thévenot 2000: 212). Dodier gives the example of the situation of a medical examination to describe how the supports of action become “activated” within a specific situation, and how they commit agents to a specific action regime. Much more than simply following a rule, actors draw on a whole situated equipment that is mobilized at the same moment than the rule, and it “engages” the actors in the situation in a specific manner. Doctors use of a stethoscope, for instance, “triggers a whole clinical procedure within which the sounds he hears through his instrument take on a diagnostic significance. The technical object only becomes operational in an activity when all the linkages have been made ensuring that it becomes part of a network” (Dodier 1995: 164). While the engagement in a situation of medical examination is not irreversible, it has a certain rigidity: “it sometimes takes a considerable amount of work to sift out what has been articulated by the past despite our intentions” (Dodier 2010). This also involves the possibility of asymmetric access to conventional action clues – while a doctor can mobilize specialized expert knowledge and a scientific dispositive of comparison, allowing to perform a diagnosis, the patient has no choice than to recur to a regime of individual experience and personal proximity. The typical professional distant attitude towards cases, being only apprehended by their medical properties, but also the often-voiced feeling of disrespect and lack of empathy that is enshrined in the medical vocabulary bears witness of these different action regimes. Much of professional work, particularly in the field of social professions, consists of translating, transforming and compromising between different regimes of action.

These principles of construction transcending the situation are the politics, logics of justification based on a conception of the common good that is valid for all. If persons are in a situation of dispute (which – as explained above, do by far not cover all situations of social life), and are exposed to the imperative of justification, actors are called to provide arguments for their claims, they have to resort to some sort of “common good”, which means that their justice demands are not arbitrary (or simply utilized “ad-hoc” as in ethnomethodology) but correspond to some kind of justice. These policies provide the rules of acceptability for criticism and justification. The theoretical architecture of Boltanski and Thévenot introduces a link between moral philosophy and the sociology of action. As people are moved “by a

concern for the good” (Boltanski/Thévenot 2000: 208), they have recourse to different, historically and socially located “grammars” that exist outside the situation of dispute in order to re-enforce their position within a concrete dispute. This is conceived as active work, as the attachment of a specific situated claim of a person to a higher common principle requires to attach the particularistic claim to that higher common principle able to find adhesion by the other actors that are concerned. Conventions theory focusses on social coordination in situated activities by means of different socio-cultural coordination logics and as such it has some undeniable similarities with symbolic interactionism. Firstly, both approaches develop their position in demarcation towards sociological approaches that conceive actors as “cultural dopes” (Garfinkel 1967). For Garfinkel, actors are able to use their embodied knowledge systems methodologically and situationally, Thévenot and Boltanski on their side equip actors with a “critical capacity” (Boltanski/Thévenot 1999: 359), e.g. to voice criticism, to produce justifications in order to support their criticisms and to operate more or less skillfully with the rules of acceptability that are given by the different orders of worth. Diaz-Bone coins the term “pragmatist institutionalism” (Diaz-Bone 2011: 47) for the methodological standpoint of conventions theory. Unlike economic institutionalism, in which “institutions” are considered as constraints for action, conventions theory starts from the assumption that

“instead of being determined by rules, capable actors use conventions to interpret rules and to apply them to situations. From a pragmatist perspective, actors handle rules to reach a solution for the demand for coordination under the condition of uncertainty. Thereby rules are enacted in the process of action and they become internal devices which are no longer adequately conceived as external constraints” (Diaz-Bone 2011: 47).

As we have seen above, the sociology of conventions treats not all situations as situations in which actors are required to produce justifications. Not every situation is a situation of a dispute, in which the imperative of justification and the possibility of critique is given. In order to account for this fact, Thévenot has developed a theory of “regimes of engagement” (Thévenot 2001/ 2007) that lie vertically to the different public conventions. As a matter of fact, specific actions are not submitted to the imperative of justification because they are based on local and individual circumstances and as such not bound to the search of agreement within the public justificatory regimes. The notion regimes of engagement describe different figures of action that describe how actors are cognitively “engaged” in situations. Walking together side by side, having lunch or writing an article are practices that are seldom public and do not rely on the same degree of generalizability as for instance, disputing about the adequate assessment standards of a written exam of a student. Thévenot’s theory of regimes of engagements, of which the “regime of justification” is one, attempts to account for the different ways in which persons

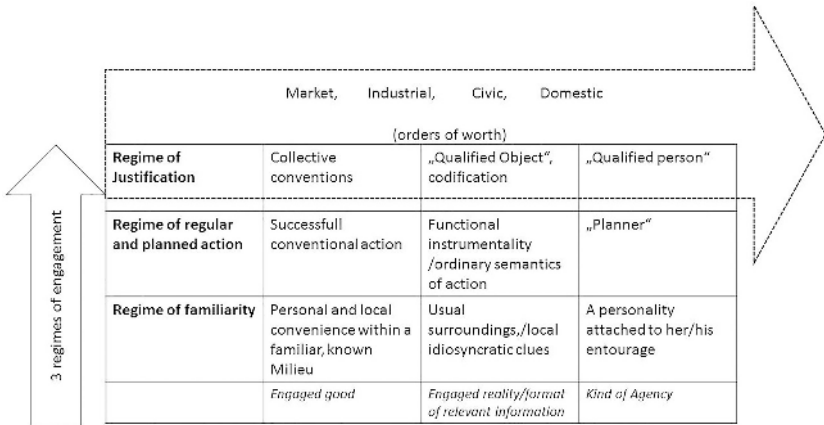
are engaged with the world, and to “account figures of action which, beyond showing habit and the body, point towards intentions and plans, or towards forms of activity that require reflective argumentation” (ibid. 2001: 58). These regimes of engagement, which exist perpendicularly to the orders of the worth framework, build on the actor concept of the economy of conventions, arguing that actors use particular modes of action in order to coordinate with others and with oneself and that they are equipped with the critical capacity to grasp the nature of a situation. As such the notion of regimes of engagement is developed because, in contemporary societies, actors are required to shift their engagement in the world between different forms of engagement, ranging from local or individual circumstances and those modes oriented towards the general or the public. Thévenot develops three distinct regimes of engagement, ranging from convenience to convention that he describes as “social devices which govern our way of engaging with our environment in as much as they articulate two notions: a) an orientation towards good: b) a mode of access to reality” (Thévenot 2001: 63). The regime of familiarity is oriented towards the good of personal and local convenience and feeling at ease, and it accesses reality as usual and used surroundings (for instance a personal workplace, with items being placed around the workplace to fit a specific, singular person). The second regime, the “regime of planned action” renders the good of a successful, planned action, an actor engaged in such a regime is accessing reality in its usefulness, its functionality for a certain plan – things, arrangements, situations are accessed as functional for reaching a specific goal. The last regime of engagement is the regime of justification, in which the good engaged in are collective conventions of the common good. An actor engaged in such a regime is geared towards achieving a form of generalizability, of justifying his actions it is a “form of activity that requires (s) reflective argumentation” (Thévenot 2001: 58). Reality is grasped by means of the codified conventional clues and objects as they are enshrined in each of the orders of Worth.

In on justification, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) develop a general framework for the analysis of processes of justification. They spell out the different Orders of Worth that actors refer to in the Regime of Justification. Their approach can be summed up as follows:

“let us take peoples' justifications seriously and study them in their plurality, let us observe how explanations are displayed and accumulate the accounts people give of their actions, and let us examine the sense of justice they thereby express” (Dodier 1993: 563).

To theoretically conceptualize modes of everyday justification, Boltanski and Thévenot build six orders of justification or polities, elaborated in detail in political philosophical texts as ideal-typical orders of worth. Each is linked to a specific principle: the inspired polity, the domestic polity, the polity of fame, the civic

Figure 1: Own Representation of Action Regimes in the Sociology of Conventions based on Thévenot (2001)



polity, the market polity, and the industrial polity. Each of these worlds also describe a specific mode of coordination: For instance, in the market order of worth, people are qualified in their role of customers, merchants or sellers, the mode of evaluation is the price, through which they coordinate their actions, also serving as mode of judgment, and actions are motivated by the desires of individuals to possess rare goods. Competition is the central metaphor of this convention. In the domestic world, people's worth rests on their hierarchical position in a chain of personal dependencies as expressed by their esteem and reputation. In the Industrial world, people are recognized in their role of experts, professionals, and efficiency, performance and functional reliance are the modes of evaluation. Objects in the world Industrial world comprise, plans, charts, graphs tools, and methods. In the civic world, the higher common principle is expressed in the primacy of the collective, of the common interest. The worth of persons is linked to their aspiration to rights as a citizen, consequently, the relevant "test" is equal treatment and the renouncement to individual particularities (as they would, for instance, be made relevant in the domestic order of worth). Relevant objects are in turn formal and official regulations and rules.

Boltanski and Thévenot attempt to construct a link between constructions of political philosophy and those by actors in disputes. Accordingly, they develop the framework of "orders of worth" by moving back and forth between different, "canonical texts" from political philosophy (see *ibid.* 2009: 68ff.) and justifications produced by actors in disputes, for instance, behavioral handbooks designed for businesses (*Ibid.*: 17). This "eminently disrespectful operation that consisted of

juxtaposing these modest compilations of highly perishable practical advice with timeless works of political philosophy” (Ibid. 17) led to the construction of the above framework. Nevertheless, one must concede that the framework of “Orders of Worth” (henceforth: OoW) is explicitly rooted in the conception of a modern pluralist society, as Boltanski and Thévenot deliberately exclude some polities and political philosophies within their analysis. This is reflected in their axioms that serve as preconditions for the functioning of their model. The first principles refer to the principle of the common humanity of the members of one polity – all members must be equally affected by the polity (ibid.: 74). Secondly, inegalitarian political constructions that exclude specific humans per se – for instance those that posit the existence “subhumans” or legitimate slavery on whatever ground are excluded. The authors do also posit the requirement that all members of a polity have equal potential for access to all the posited states (e.g. states worth and states of smallness) in each order. This is somehow close to Michael Walzer’s description of the separation of different “spheres” of justice (Walzer 1984). This serves to subdue those political philosophies that organize societies in castes, hereditary orders (feudal societies), a racial hierarchy, or on characteristics on which members of a polity have no hold over (e.g. hereditary inequalities, genes, etc.) (see ibid: 80.). In addition to these axioms, Boltanski and Thévenot argue that each polity must be equipped with some criteria based on which access to a specific good is granted, specifying access to the state’s greatness and smallness: there must be some distributional principle. Finally, the authors state that each order must comply with Rawls maximin principle, e.g. that an Injustice based on that order would maximize the prospects of the least well-off (ibid.: 14). This is to avoid that persons would simply reject the order of a polity and any justification that would rely on it.

*Tab 1: Own Representation of the Orders of Worth Framework based on Boltanski and Thévenot 2009: 159-203).*

<b>"common worlds"</b>	<b>Market</b>	<b>Industrial</b>	<b>Civic</b>	<b>Domestic</b>
<b>Higher common principle</b>	Competition/Price, cost	Technical efficiency	Collective Welfare	Esteem, reputation
<b>State of worthiness</b>	Convergence of desires resulting in price	Functional reliable, Operational	In accordance with rules and regulations	Oral, exemplary, personally warranted
<b>Objects</b>	Wealth, Luxury	Method, Task, Criterion, Plan, Graph, chart, standard, factor,	Rules and regulations, laws, fundamental rights, welfare policies	Patrimony, locale, heritage
<b>Subjects</b>	Customer, consumer, merchant, seller	Professionals, Experts, Person in charge, Operator	Equal citizens	Authority
<b>Test</b>	Market competitiveness,	Competence, reliability, planning, scientific, measurable	Equality, solidarity manifestations of the "just" cause	Trustworthiness

How can this framework be applied empirically and what are its strengths? The framework has found empirical application in real situations of "dispute" and proven a certain level of fit (see e.g. precursory works of Boltanski on denunciation, an analysis of readers' letters to the Journal "le monde" (Boltanski 1984) or the much better-known work "the new spirit of capitalism" (Boltanski/Chiapello 2007), in which a corpus of literature in management-studies is analysed. A strength of the framework of the convention is that it allows analysing coordination between different institutional logics, orders of worth, or between different demands of legitimation as the situated problem of persons, in which an "active work" (Boltanski/Chiapello 2006: 209) of compromising takes place. In this conception, actors are thus neither "cultural dopes", which slavishly follow bureaucratic rules or their embodied dispositions, nor are they strategic, utility-abyding actors as in rational choice theory. In case of insecurity or dispute, they refer, in the framework of the convention, to different "grammars" that are collectively negotiated. Despite the rather abstract design of the different Orders of Worth, Boltanski and Chiapello show that their framework is both able to analyze disputes on the level of

politics, as well as disputes on the level of everyday situations. As such Thévenot and Boltanski (2009: 216-223) make a distinction between different forms of dispute/disagreements, the first involving struggles over the purity of a "test" within one world, the second describes a "clash" between worlds (ibid. 223). For the conflict within an order of worth. Boltanski and Thévenot give the example of two travellers arguing over a seat in a train (ibid.: 219). Within this well-equipped situation (numbered seats, tickets, specific rules), the test within the civic nature of this situation consists of defining which of the two-person is entitled to the reserved seat. The passengers "may have recourse to the conductor, who establishes a link between the objects and the test (for instance specific ticket with a privileged status), the passengers may as well criticize the test itself as a specific object for its completion is lacking" (See Boltanski/Thévenot 2006: 219). The second form of dispute arises from the fact that persons can manifest themselves in different worlds and can recur to different orders of worth when entering a dispute. Thévenot (2002: 184) gives an illustrative example of the situated and principally open negotiation by showing possible recourses to conventional orders of worth in their interpretation of an action.

*Tab 2: Conventional orders of Worth – Example Taken from Thévenot (2002: 184)*

	<b>Blood donor CIVIC</b>	<b>Blood donor MARKET</b>
<b>Interpreter CIVIC</b>	Sympathetic (cell1)	greedy (cell2)
<b>Interpreter MARKET</b>	Naïve (cell 3)	realistic(cell4)

For conflicts between orders of worth, Thévenot (2002) gives the example of blood donation. The action of blood donation can, for instance, be performed either according to the "civic" or the "market" order of worth, while it can also be interpreted in terms of one of these two. Cell 1 and cell 4 represent a situation in which both actors and interpreters agree on the nature of the action – there is no dispute. Cell 3 and 4 comprise cases in which actors and interpreters analyze the situation according to different forms of action. In cell 2, the interpreter would for instance, with reference to the CIVIC OoW, claim that there is a right to access to health services for each citizen and that in accordance, blood donations are a civic duty and should not be subject to market exchange. In the case of cell 3, the interpreter could denounce the naivety of the actor's altruistic act of giving blood, as he did not act according to the principles of the Market order of worth (Thévenot 2002: 184). Such a situation in which coordination is insecure and in which actors have to come to an (even fragile) agreement about how a situation is to be treated is called,



in the vocabulary of the economy of conventions a "reality test" (Boltanski/Thévenot 2006: 88), in which actors aspire to a higher level of generalizability (in French: a "montée en généralité"), as an attempt to put in relation the particularities of the situation (blood donorship) with a generalizable entity, an overarching principle, according to which a situation is to be treated. This "montée en généralité" leads to a specific way of formatting the information contained in that situation, while other ways of evaluation are ignored or even openly refuted. This example both exemplifies the open nature of situations of dispute and the "embedded agency" that comes with the restriction of agent's critiques through different orders of worth that are attached to specific situations. The leading idea is that persons coordinate their actions through conventions that can "unite" different actors behind an idea of the common good. Conventions play the role of "cognitive schemata" convention-based carriers, or "supports of action" (Dodier 2010). They are "interpretative schemata" (Diaz-Bone 2012; Thévenot 2010) that can be external to the situation but refer to a specific way of formatting the information that is precluded in a situated arrangement, and refer to generalized, "collective established cultural forms of coordination and evaluation" (Ibid. own translation). Specifically, and just like in Friedland and Alford's conception of institutional logics, it is the fact of "contradictory logics" or of "conflicting worlds" (Boltanski/Chiapello 2006) that lead to insecurity and accordingly, the need for coordination, both in situ, thus the direct level of action, and on the level of more complex arrangements, like organizations and policies.

#### **4.1.7. Organizations as Devices for Complex Coordination: Conflicts and Compromises in Human Service Organizations**

The economy of conventions has found ample application in the analysis of organizations. While early works in conventionalist theory (see e.g. Eymard-Duvernay/Salais/Storper) have mainly focused on firms as producing organizations, later work has applied the conventionalist framework to a range of other organizations, for instance schools (Derouet 1989, 1992), welfare organizations (Thévenot 1995, Stavo-Debaugue/Breviglieri 2006), health policies (Batifoulier 1992), social housing offices (Eymard-Duvernay/Marchal 1994), CO<sub>2</sub>-certificate trading (Knoll 2012) or in public employment services (Grüttner 2015). A conventionalist reading of organizations breaks with an "over-coordinated" view of organizations (Thévenot 2001), and with concepts that overemphasize bureaucratic rules, hierarchical prescriptions, shared representations and common cultures, in favor of a model that "emphasizes a notion of coordination being more open to uncertainty and the dynamics of coordination and accounting for the plurality of modes of coordination" (Thévenot 2001a: 406). Drawing on his orders of worth framework, Thévenot describes organizations as "compromising devices" (Thévenot 2001a:

410). For Thévenot, organizations are “arrangements which have been specifically designed for such a compromised complexity. Therefore, their members must engage in different modes of coordination, depending on the configuration of the situation in which they find themselves” (ibid.). As such, Thévenot clarifies that one should not see organizations in strict correspondence to each order of worth (e.g. civic worth to the state, domestic worth to the family or industrial worth to the firm, as “all organizations have to cope with critical tensions between different orders of worth” (Thévenot 2001a: 411). Thévenot exemplifies his position by giving examples of production organizations and of public services to describe critical tensions of different orders of worth. For the first case, “firms should be treated as a compromising device between several modes of coordination [...] involving at least the market and the industrial modes. This definition emphasizes the plurality of the worlds entangled in the making of the firm” (Thévenot 2001a: 412). Thévenot refers to well documented potential conflicts resulting from the necessary planification, storage, standardization, and engineering of a product on the one side, and the demands resulting from the orientation of short-sighted and sometimes volatile client demand and highlights the different compromises of actors in firms find to attenuate the tensions resulting from these conflicting demands. Firms and organizations are described in their characteristics of having found specific “compromises” between different relevant orders of worth, each organization providing a specific way of compromise. This will be described by some examples from a large number of studies that apply the “orders of worth” framework to non-profit organizations, cooperatives, and social enterprises. Soren Jagd (2011), drawing on the “compromising devices” argument reviews 30 studies that used the OoW framework. He reviews a research Study by Anne Catherine Provost (2002) In which she shows that different elderly care organizations can be differentiated by the specific compromises they realize between conflicting OoW: “between civic and domestic orders of worth (non-profit organizations), between market and industrial orders of worth (profit organizations), and between civic and fame (public organizations)” (Jagd 2011: 346) The formal organizational structure is seen as a device for designing specific compromises between the different orders of worth of relevance to the nursing home sector. These specific compromises extend, as Mourseli and Cobbaut (2006 cited In Jagd 2011) show, to specific ways to defining quality: non-profit long-term care organizations in terms of living conditions of their patients, and market-oriented for-profit facilities on quantifiable indicators along more standardiseable criteria (number of beds, number of nurses on duty, costs per bed, and so on. Derouet, in his analysis of French schools, describes schools as “composite enterprises” (Derouet 1989), which are composed of civic, industrial and market logic. Such hybrid organizational arrangements (Evers 2007) are at the same time venue of compromise and of the conflictual encounter of different logics of justification, logics that are also carried

through the different actor-constellations within an organization and outside, in the institutional environment of an organization (Maroy 1990).

#### 4.1.8. Human Service Work in the Light of the Sociology of Conventions

For the field of public services and welfare policies, Thévenot analyses in several publications (1995, 2001a, 2001b) the conflicting rationalities that result from the complex conventional environment of public service organizations. He describes the discussion on the marketisation of public services as a classical "dispute" where actors subsequently apply tests from the market order of worth and the civic order of worth. The first proposes to substitute the civic, state-led or corporatist forms of governance of public services by a competitive market based on the claim of their alleged "ineffectiveness" (TEST) and, on the basis that the latter is better able to suit the veritable interests of the concerned customers (SUBJECTS). On the other side, the "civic" order of worth, focusing on the "general interest" (STATE OF WORTHINESS) that public services contribute to, the rights-based access to a public service open to all that is geared towards the reduction of inequalities and the access to citizenship status independently of local, domestic attachments. For Thévenot, these disputes lead to often "fragile" compromises, designating the "kind of composition between orders of worth (and not only between particular interests) which suspends controversy" (ibid.) The notion of a 'competitive public service', (Thévenot 2001b), but also the notion of "User" that integrates the contradiction between the notion of 'citizen' and the notion of 'client', are examples of a "fragile compromise that, while maintaining a relative way of coordinating two conflicting logics, remains open to criticism and is refutable within situations of dispute" (Thévenot 2001). Prescriptively, Thévenot posits the need to account for the necessary plurality of possible specifications of the common good, and to the necessity that "market qualifications of services or specifications of users as clients need at to enter in compromise with other orders of justifications of the public service" (Thévenot 2001b: 92, own translation). The "tyranny" of the market order of worth over the others is described as a form of violence, resulting in a situation in which "critique" and "justification" are made impossible. Thévenot cites empirical research on French family benefit offices (Adjerad 1995) to show how conflicts between the "INDUSTRIAL" and the "CIVIC" OoW characterise both organisational structure and everyday work of welfare administrations.

As highlighted by these authors, these conflicts also pertain on the level of frontline work of welfare agents, who -in the case of Adjerad's study - express concern for the civic preoccupation of an "effective" exercise of user's rights and the need to correct for inequalities of access to services and benefits and on the other side, the risk of a "civic segmentation" of users according to access difficulties. This results in a tension of an "industrial segmentation" of client groups, which, "in-

strumented through the technical organization of the welfare benefit agency, favors those clients that are most easily to serve" (Thévenot 2001b, 11). The latter puts forward criteria of evaluation that are close to effectiveness indicators privileged by management. In his article "Governing life by standards – a view from engagements", Thévenot further expands his description of conflicts between different OoW to the discussion of standardisation in health facilities and social organizations drawing on the evidence-based medicine movement – a movement that exists too in the field of social work (Dahmen 2010, Otto/Polutta /Ziegler 2009, Sackett et. al 1996, McNeece/Thyer 2004). The claim to use the "conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions" (Sackett 1996) relates to at least two OoW. Through "encouraging transparency of what is done and to what effect, and involvement of clients as informed participants in decisions that affect their lives" (Gambrill 2004: 166), thus their focus on the protection of citizens from the allegedly excessive paternalism of professional authority through basing treatment decisions on the treatment with the highest performance the EBP-movement draws on the CIVIC worth of equality and access and quality of services for citizens. With its focus on clear, standardized treatment plans, a clear hierarchy of evidence and interventions that are to be delivered as designed and that is based on scientific knowledge, the EBP-movement is based on the same extent on the INDUSTRIAL worth of technical efficiency. According to Thévenot (2009), this compromise is enshrined in the production of standards and treatment plans that are at risk of "overshadow(ing) the need for public justification" (Thévenot 2009: 807). Thévenot thus stresses the oppression and subjugation standardization that the INDUSTRIAL order of worth can engender:

"Indeed, the demands of EBM effectively avoid scaling considerations back up to a plurality of common goods and their possible combinations. And yet the treatment of plurality is at the heart of politics. To celebrate time-saving and alleged value-free procedures through standards is to forget that explicit politics have been subsumed into the elaboration of the standard objective, often removing them from any opportunity for open political debate" (Thévenot 2009: 808).

As made clear in this quote, the composition of organizational arrangements, being constituted by a plurality of definitions of the common good, are at risk of being overshadowed by the sole focusing on a single OoW that makes dispute and justification impossible. For Thévenot the latter amounts to an oppression "of justifiable engagements geared towards the common good" (Thévenot 2009: 806) which risks being destroyed by standardization. In addition, on the frontline-level, the "DOMESTIC" OoW of trust and mutual understanding between the frontline agent and client enters the equation. The client processing activities, are based on a compliance of the client. The call for "individualized services" formulates a critique geared against the potentially disrespecting logic of simple bureaucratic process-

ing and subsumption of cases into legal categories calls based on a DOMESTIC OoW. Equally, care work, social work or education is hardly imaginable without the attempt to consider the person with its close attachments, in its particularities, going beyond a perspective that perceives clients simply as a category of carriers of citizenship rights. The Domestic OoW is thus equally part of the possible qualifications of a public service. Thévenot gives the example of the highly valorized dimension of contact and everyday solidarity that for instance post officers pursue within their everyday work, particularly for persons in rural areas. Tensions between the "DOMESTIC" and the "CIVIC" order of worth have also been observed in the institutionalisation of care-work (Pattaroni 2005), risking to "ignore tensions between regimes that result from integrating familiar engagement within professional and highly regulated duties" (Thévenot 2008: 20). Breviglieri, Stavo-Debauge, and Pattaroni (2003) describe the tensions resulting from the emergence of the "Domestic OoW" in welfare policies in a more systematic manner. They identify a transformation of contemporary welfare policies from redistributive activities based on abstract and universal categories of entitlements towards a new concern for the subjectivities of users, calling for a new form of DOMESTIC "proximity" of social workers and their clients. This tendency is, according to the authors exemplified through the trend to develop individual, contractualised integration plans on the one side and on the other side, on the increased reliance on counseling, individualized activation and the grammar of individual autonomy. While the authors recognize the potential excesses of "proximity" and the grammar of individual autonomy (e.g. In terms of an "injunction to autonomy" (Duvoux 2006), they decide to describe the "practical assemblies" ("montages pratiques") (ibid: 143) that Social Workers must pursue to "reconcile the demands of "proximity work" and the general demands weighting on their professional activity (equality of treatment, inscription in a public policy)" (Breviglieri et. al 2003: 144 own translation). They describe, based on empirical observations of welfare settings in France and Switzerland, that the regime of "justifiable action", in which users are evaluated in terms of different orders of worth is partly suspended in favor of a more "familiar" a regime of engagement. Proximity, in this way, does not serve to perform a "test" according to one of the OoW (e.g. eligibility checking and conformity to specific behavioral demands in the CIVIC OoW, or the ability to withstand the evaluation criteria of the labor market "MARKET") but allows for social workers to construct a "morally responsible person" (Breviglieri/Stavo-Debauge 2006: 130), a person that is able to withstand the justificatory requirements of the engagement within public regimes of justification. For Breviglieri et. al (2003: 146), this applies particularly for "vulnerable" persons. Vulnerability expresses oneself – in the words of Paul Ricoeur – as a threat or loss of basic autonomy in the sense of giving "narrative coherence" (Ricoeur 1992) to their experience, of access and expression to own wishes and desires that are required for self-determination. According to these authors, the use of a contractualised in-

tegration agreement or the planification of one's own future integration pathway requires a person to deal with a whole range of conventional demands a capacity that cannot be assumed right away. As a matter of fact, welfare policies often presuppose the autonomy of their clients they are supposed to restore. Breviglieri and Stavo-Debaugé describe that "In order to reconcile this gap, the social worker often has to partly free himself from the conventional demands at the level of the organization, and in some sense pass "below the conventions" (Breviglieri/Stavo-Debaugé 2006: 129). The register of proximity, disengaged from any judgment and test, allows the exhibition of the user's own self without being at risk of being judged right away, and where the principle of confidentiality "suppresses the possibility that confessions made have a negative impact as suspended from any judgment, sometimes allowing to the users to regain confidence and preventing them from dropping out of the social facility" (see e.g. Breviglieri et. al 2003: 147). Thévenot (2008) describes the dealing with these different conflicts and their appeasement through the crafting of situated compromises in Social Work practice as an "art of composition" (see also Dahmen 2019) "which implies to integrate these different engagements while preventing the tyranny of one of them and the oppressions on another" (Thévenot 2008: 20). For Thévenot, Social Work implies the composition of different regimes of engagement, "from the familiar confidence and attachments that have to be maintained, to the engagement in a plan supporting projects, to the public requirement of qualification tests following different orders of worth (Market, Industrial, Civic)" (Thévenot 2008: 20). This "art of composition" is a "delicate composition work between regimes – between the familiar, the plan and the most public forms of justification available through the law" (Thévenot 2009: 808) that requires the fashioning of compromises to appease tensions resulting from the plural definition of the common good. This "art of composition" – the "watchful combination of several regimes, when careful attention is paid to the potential pressures between them, leads to [...] putting them together in a way that locally and temporally lowers the respective pressures" (Thévenot: 2008: 18). Thévenot gives the example of the complex social situation in which social workers perform house visits. On the one side, "they have the duty to enforce regulations and standards and refer to legal officers in case of infringement" (ibid.) and are bound to specific conventionalized schemes of interpretation of the situation in which the persons are assessed in the regime of justification. On the other side – and even more increasingly in the activating state in which the "ethos of desirable self-regulation" (see Yeatman 2007) becomes an ethical yardstick of welfare policies, "they usually also implement contractual agreements relying on individual projects through which attended persons are supposed to empower and gain autonomy, and which involve the formalization of an engagement in plan" (Thévenot 2008: 20). For Thévenot, a "good social worker" has to integrate the third regime of familiar engagement" (ibid.) that means, the way in which a person is engaged with the world to serve

of the good of personal and local convenience and feeling at ease, and its personal access to reality as usual and used surroundings. It is shown that this undertaking is far from ambivalent, sometimes engendering the deliberate infringement of one or the other rule and requiring a delicate balancing between the different pragmatic regimes. In the case of home visits,

“Obviously the social worker should not mutually engage in such a regime (the regime of familiar engagement S.D.) and become intimate or close friend with the attended person but he must asymmetrically take into account the required familiar accommodation to surroundings which supports the primordial ease and self-confidence of the person, and usually infringes for this purpose some of the regulations or even contractual engagements. “Care” is the category to deal with such a relation” (Thévenot 2008: 20).

This surely bears the risk of ignoring tensions between regimes that result from integrating familiar engagement within professional and highly regulated duties. Such tensions between different regimes of engagement are also highlighted by Breviglieri et. al. In an analysis of a French active labor-market program for young unemployed Breviglieri and Stavo-Debauge (2006) show that these policies take the form of preparing clients to the evaluation tests of the labor market and are as such clearly geared towards a highly regulated situation of coordination, the recruitment situation in the labor market. Nevertheless, social workers do not simply emulate the conventional “tests” of a recruitment situation, but they start from the temporary and ordinary dispositions and attachments of the users (habits, character traits, aspirations, stable desires), in order to gradually lead them to a state where they can pertain as a publicly qualified person in the tests with whom young persons are confronted when entering the labor market. The progressive development of individual autonomy and an inclination to be self-reliant happens through the regime of proximity, also allowing to develop a pervasive force (Pattaroni 2005) through giving a promise from person to person. This proximity work, the taking into account of the familiar regime of engagement serves to manufacture client’s consent and to “account for the restrictions and limits that hinder the client to envisage the life they aspire to” (Breviglieri/Pattaroni/Stavo-Debauge 2003: 150, own translation). The Social workers remain nevertheless submitted to strong tensions to connect this proximal, non-judgemental attitude to the client with their position as representatives of the institution and their aspiration to act in accordance with legal regulations. As Thévenot highlights, the different tests and conflicts do happen on at least three levels: on the level of the legitimacy of state-policies, on the level of the functioning rules of organizations, and, last but not least, on the level of interactions between frontline workers and their relations with service users (Thévenot 2001b). It is this “level of interaction” that stands in the center of this research.

#### 4.1.9. Conclusion: Applying Convention Theory for the Analysis of Human Service Work

Based on the previous chapter, we are now able to assess the added value of a conventions theory framework for the analysis of the frontline implementation of activation policies. The notion “activation in action” implies that a complex policy (guided by legal rules, specific embeddedness in an organizational field and a complex, sometimes contradictory conventional arrangement) has to be translated into concrete organizational practices. The framework of the sociology of conventions particularly well suited for the analysis of such a process of translation. First, the economy of conventions accounts for the incompleteness of institutions and rules for the coordination of actions. Situations of insecurity are intricately in need for in-situ re-actualization and coordination. As it conceives even clear-cut bureaucratic rules as in need to be situatively applied and interpreted by competent actors, it goes far beyond the “implementation – control – discretion – narrative” (Maynard-Moody/Musheno 2012) of street-level bureaucracy approaches. With the idea of a “competent actor” that can manipulate symbolic practices but that is situatively bound to specific conventions, the sociology of conventions provides a model of “embedded agency” (Thornton/Occasio 2008: 104) of welfare professionals operating in contradictory social worlds. As such it provides fertile soil for an action-theoretic framework for new-institutionalist theory (see also Knoll 2008). Secondly, the sociology of conventions accounts for the plurality of conventionalized interpretative schemata that are at the disposition of actors for this coordination. While in new institutionalism, this plurality results from the exchange relations of organizations with their institutional environment, in the conventions framework, it results from the fact that organizations are composite arrangements, compromising devices, made up of plural orders of worth which must be compromised on the different levels of organizations. For instance, on the macro-level activation policies usually comprise at least the market order of worth (where an orientation towards the labor-market becomes apparent) and civic order of worth (where bureaucratic eligibility rules and the imperative of equal treatment before the law become ubiquitous). Third, this perspective allows conceptualizing the use of conventions in the judgment of the quality of persons and things. The “people processing” and “people changing” activities in human service organizations require complex, often morally infused judgments over persons. For the concrete implementation of the policy at hand, actors are required to perform ubiquitous judgments on persons, infused with insecurity and a plurality of possible interpretative schemes: “Is a person “apt for placement?”, “Should a “fragile” person be sent to an internship at the risk of “burning” an employer?” “How should be dealt with repeatedly coming too late?”. These processes of evaluation and classification so central for people processing activities are far from trivial. In these diverse insecure action situations, actors must



actively build a compromise between the resources made available through general, publicly available orders of justification and the respective situation at hand. In such a perspective, institutional rules and regulations are part of the conventional equipment of a situation that acts as “supports for action” (Dodier 2010) but that must be activated in order to become relevant in that situation. This expresses itself in a methodological standpoint that can be qualified as “complex pragmatic situationalism” (Diaz-Bone 2011: 43). While the unit of analysis is the coordination situation at hand, the focus of the sociology of conventions is on the one side, the equipment of the situation with a plurality of conventions (and the objects, practice forms, rules and so on that “carry” them) and on the other side, the situative interpretation of this situation through actors equipped with a “critical capacity”.

## 5. Methodology, Research Design and Data Collection

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### 5.1. A Focus on Activation Practices

As described in the introductory statement, the present book aims at reconstructing how transitions from school to work are regulated in human service organizations. It aims at analyzing processes of gate-keeping and of subjectivation in front-line organizations of the transition system. Starting from the theoretical observation (chapter 3) that the "missing link" in research on youth transitions is the interaction between institutional processing logics (and their interdependence with different stakeholders from their organizational environment) and the individual biographies, the following section describes the methodological principles, the research design and the analytical strategy that were used in the present study. The main theoretical premise of the following study is that organizations of the transition system operate a translation of macro- and meso- structural features within the microsociological, especially life-course-related biographical decisions of individuals. The previous review of literature (chapter 3) has shown that the microsociological regulation of transitions happens in a nexus that is located between institutional demands on the one side and individual self-thematisation on the other. As Kohli described, the life-course constitutes both an individual program and a subjective construction. The analysis of front-line implementation of human service organizations in the field of transition measures sensitizes for the transmission of this "institutional program" into the "set of biographical orientations by which to organize one's experiences and plans" (Kohli 2007: 274). As such focus of this research will focus – on a first step – on the concrete, situated design of transition policies within one specific human service organisation. Here, the analysis will mainly focus on the frontline implementation of a measure by welfare professionals with close attention to the ways in which they categorize and assess individual biographies according to specific social frameworks, and how these frameworks relate to the specific organizational reality of the measure. It is this organisational dimension that Heinz pointed to when he wrote that "gate-keepers act on behalf of their institutions and legitimize decisions by reference to organizational reality – that is, to regulations, professional standards, application queues and so on" (Heinz

1993: 1). I call this the “people processing/gate-keeping” (Hasenfeld 1972) aspect of the analysis. Starting from the idea of human service organizations as “subjectivation devices” the processes in which participants of transition are “constructed” as subjects, respectively the ways in which the participants are invited to “work on themselves” constitutes the second focus of analysis. I call this the “people changing” (Hasenfeld 1972) aspect of the analysis. While both aspects are strongly intertwined, they designate two different sensitizing concepts, one from research on human service organizations the other focusing on life-course sociology. Finally, I will aim at not simply analyzing the “templates” for subjectivation that can be found in the different classification and categorisation devices of the organisation, but also analyse the potential impact of these templates on the self-interpretations and the “biographical work” (Gubrium/Hollstein 1995) of the participants. The knowledge categories and cognitive categories used by welfare professionals have both an objectifying and a subjectifying character. On the one side they shape the young person as institutionally recognizable subjects (for instance as a person having not enough skills to enter a certain apprenticeship). On the other side, young persons learn to act as “subjects” through subjecting and reorganizing themselves (and their biography) in this discursive vocabulary. Research on the activating state that operated with the Foucauldian governmentality toolbox has shown that the new rationalities of government focus on the creation of an active welfare subject, of a “entrepreneurial self” (Bröckling 2016) through putting the service users in a position that induces him to “work on oneself” (Duvoux/Astier 2006). The self-governing, autonomous subject (Yeatman 2007) is the underlying ethos. Less often has research analyzed how organisations of the transition system practically participate in the construction and institutionalisation of such action orientations. Even less so has research analyzed how clients of human service organizations react to this institutionalized imperative of autonomous life-conduct. As activation aims at the promotion of desirable self-regulation (Dean 2007), microsociological methods that are interested in detailed protocols of practices, allow an insight into what the activating state is about (Mayerhofer (2007: 26). As such, it is my aim to analyze how organizations of the transition system operate as environments that influence the practical relations to oneself and to the world, and how they act as “discursive environments for self-construction” (Gubrium/Holstein 1995) in the context of a transition-specific human service organization. A building block for the envisaged analysis of activation as a practice constitutes the critical assessment of contemporary street-level research in chapter 4 and the abandonment of a conception of street-level bureaucrats’ practice as a rational and deliberate adaptation to institutional incentives and rules. Rather than conceiving SLB-practices as contributing to or jeopardizing higher-order technical-bureaucratic organizational goals, SLB-practices have to be analyzed in their own right. To put it bluntly: Organizational rules are not simply implemented but require situated, case-based

interpretation, and while street-level workers do occupy specific roles in the formal hierarchy of an organization and this profoundly shapes their institutional culture, “their decisions and actions are guided by meaning, not function” (Maynard-Moody/Musheno 2000: 253). As described in chapter 4.1, future SLB-research thus needs to focus on the “pragmatic improvisation as an expression within the context of rules, practices, and roles” (ibid: 520). Rather than utilizing “conventional and simplistic notions of hierarchical rationality” (Maynard Moody/Portillo 2010: 254) and has to avoid operating with a “false distinction prevalent to date between street-level discretion and rule-based implementation” (ibid.: 271). Based on the theoretical premises that have been elaborated on in chapter 4, activation will be analyzed as a practice, as a practical accomplishment. Borrowing from Schatzki’s definition of practices, I conceive the latter as a “temporally evolving, open-ended set of doings and sayings linked by practical understandings, rules, teleo-affective structures, and general understandings” (Schatzki 2002: 87). The research is thus interested in those doings and sayings that make up activation as a practice. This implies that the focus of this research is less on the attitudes and the intentional individual behavior of welfare professionals. As Knorr-Cetina puts it, the notion of practice “shifts the focus away from mental objects, such as the interests or intentions that inform concepts of action, and toward the reordered conditions and dynamics of the chains of action of collective life” (Knorr-Cetina 1999: 10). Practices understood in the abovementioned way are not primarily rooted in an individual subject but rooted in a specific social site in which they take place (Schatzki 2002: xi). Social sites are the “intricate fabric of practices, objects, meanings and identities [...] of a particular social and material order” (Nicolini 2013: 185) that in our case – constitutes the site of activation<sup>1</sup>. The notion of “social site” has striking similarities with the “methodological situationalism” (Diaz-Bone 2011: 49) advocated in the sociology of conventions. In the vocabulary of the sociology of conventions, “situations” are not restricted to “face-to-face” situations. The conventionalist “methodological situationalism” (Diaz-Bone 2011: 49) defines situations as

“complex arrangements or constellations of objects, cognitive formats, problems (coordinations to be realised), institutional settings, persons, concepts. Such sit-

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1 This definition of the “social site” of practices bears similarities with Maynard-Moody’s and Musheno’s idea that structures should not be viewed as the antipode of discretionary decision-making but that structures (such as laws, budgets and rules, practices, routines) “are the core of resources that make up, with schemas, the nature of structure and give meaning to human agency” (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2012: 520). Structures (or in the vocabulary of practice theory, “orders” as arrangements of entities e.g. people, artefacts, things Schatzki 2002: xi) do not predefine, but empower or restrict certain courses of action over others. As such, discretion is not the counterpoint of “rules” – but it is rules (and other structures) that give sense to, prefigure and legitimize specific practices of SLBs.

uations are historically embedded in society in which conventions are already established because they have demonstrated in the long run their usefulness. It is the level of the situation where EC integrates micro- and macrolevel realities because in situations they realize their effects and their interwoven and interrelated ontologies” (Diaz-Bone 2011: 49).

For my research, this implies to show how abstract orders of justification – embedded in texts, rules, objects or persons – are applied in social situations, as well as how professionals deal with institutional contradictions and insecure situations. As Boltanski and Thévenot describe, the multiple orders of worth that they developed through reference to different political philosophies become visible in the daily occurrence of disputes and situations of coordination and “are also embodied in the objectified devices that make up daily situations” (Boltanski/Thévenot 1999: 366). This definition of situations does not restrict to those situations characterised by an obvious “dispute”, rather, the need for local coordination by means of conventions also becomes obvious in everyday situations in which a policy is implemented. As has been described in chapter 4, this applies particularly in the context of the translation of general policy guidelines (e.g. rules) in the context of street-level work. Here, generalized rules are often inappropriate for the situation, goals are often multiple and contradictory and the transformation of these rules into addressable expectations through interactive work is insecure and hardly predictable. In addition, rules are hardly the counterpoint of discretion, but rules give sense and legitimize specific practices of SLB’s. Both rule-bound and discretionary practice requires active interpretation and interactive transformation of rules. While the situated, actual practicing of welfare professionals in a specific moment in time is inherently indeterminate and allow, yes require scope for creativity and situated adaptation (see also chapter 4), practices are always located in a complex arrangement of different entities (people, artifacts, things) that “prefigure<sup>2</sup>” practices, as way of “channeling forthcoming activity” (Schatzki 2002: 44). Such a conception of practices has implications for the research design and methodology. As “an organization is more than what there is to it in real-time” (Schatzki 2006: 1863), one

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2 Schatzki proposes – in order to get his idea of “prefiguration” right, “that attention be [...] directed to the multitudinous ways that the mesh of practices and orders makes courses of action easier, harder, simpler, more complicated, shorter, longer, ill-advised, promising of ruin, promising of gain, disruptive, facilitating, obligatory or proscribed, acceptable or unacceptable, more or less relevant, riskier or safer, more or less feasible, more or less likely to induce ridicule or approbation—as well as physically impossible or possible and feasible or unfeasible” (Schatzki 2002: 225). The idea is thus to look at how a semantic, symbolic, cultural and material setting enables and constraints certain courses of action (without predetermining them).

cannot contend to analyze only the directly observable ongoing doings and sayings of actors. In conclusion, it is necessary to develop a methodology that goes beyond a pure observation of “what happens”, as such an approach would withhold possibilities to analyze those materials, cognitive and normative aspects of practice that structure them. For instance, Schatzki proposes to analyse practices as made up both of actions and structure, structure embracing (at least) four phenomena: “(1) understandings of (complexes of know-hows regarding) the actions constituting the practice [...] (2) rules, by which I mean explicit directives, admonishments, or instructions that participants in the practice observe or disregard; (3) something I call a teleological-affective structuring, which encompasses a range of ends, projects, actions, maybe emotions, and end-project-action combinations (teleological orderings) that are acceptable for or enjoined of participants to pursue and realize; and (4) general understandings, for example general understandings about the nature of work, about proper teacher-student interactions, or about the commonality of fate” (Schatzki 2006: 1864). Schatzki does thus account for the fact that beyond their situated performance, practices require an evolving set of general understandings on the side of the participants, that these practices are embedded into explicit directives, bureaucratic rules and instructions, a space of collective reasons and “concerns” for action that are geared towards an end and that Schatzki calls “teleological orderings” and general understandings of a practice by the participants that can best be described as an explicit form of knowledge about the appropriateness of different action paths. As stated before, the analysis of institutional realities as described by Schatzki bears similarities with the “complex pragmatist situationalism” (Diaz-Bone 2011: 44) of the sociology of conventions: While the focus of the analysis is dedicated to the concrete situation in which the analyzed policy is put into practice, thus on “doings” and “sayings” (Schatzki 2002) of the frontline professionals, the latter are embedded within situations that are equipped with a plurality of conventions as a plurality of possible logics of coordination. The process of dealing with ambiguous and contradictory situations is embedded within a web of interpretation frames, conventionalized clues, institutionalized rules and regulations that must be analyzed in its own terms. The research design follows these intuitions: the embeddedness of practices in these different features requires to develop a multi-modal data collection strategy. The durability of practices is accounted for through focusing on the tools and instruments that mediate these practices (Nicolini 2013: 228). Cultural artifacts (such as official documents and guidelines) “constitute a means of transmission of social knowledge by carrying inscribed within them objectified norms of cognition, assumptions about how work should be carried out and the purposes of their use” (Nicolini 2013: 228). The task of research is then a double one: first, to describe the inscriptions these cultural artefacts carry into the situation, second, to reconstruct the way these inscriptions and repertoires of action are activated in situations.

### 5.1.1. Research design and data collection

The aim of the present study is to provide a Grounded Theory of activation practices. Following the general principles of Grounded Theory, this implies a simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis (see e.g. Strauss/Corbin 1998, Charmaz 2006), a sampling aimed towards theory-development as well as an iterative process of discovery that constantly switches between data analysis and theory development. As such, using a Grounded Theory method has implications both for the methods of data gathering as well as for theoretical development (Charmaz 2006: 16). For instance, during the research process, the choice of specific interview partners, observation sites and documents was not implemented as designed and planned at the beginning of the research process, but the construction of new data collection methods and the selection of specific interview partners were guided by the progressive further development of the research focus. The idea to use a multimodal data analysis including interviews (in various forms), ethnographic observation and analysis of documents and texts was born after the first round of formal interviews and field visits. This methodological decision was also fueled by a gradual change of the research focus: While at the beginning, I was mainly interested in the ways in which welfare professionals made sense of their practice and how they balanced contradictory organizational expectations, the research gradually developed a concern for the central processes and work procedures, the concrete action problems as they appear in the daily work of the organization, thus the practices typical to the field. One example of this evolving process of “theoretical sampling” (Strauss/Corbin 1998) is the choice of specific observational settings based on interview data. I was theoretically sensitized to the question of how the organization processes people. The first round of formal interviews allowed me to get information on the relevant spatial and temporal settings that would constitute interesting situations for ethnographic observation and for more specific in depth-interviews. It thus comes as no surprise that the research design is inspired by ethnographic research and data analysis strategies. While “ethnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time” (Atkinson/Hammersley 2007: 3), this research project only comprised three one-week observation periods. It might thus be an overstatement to describe this research as a fully-fledged ethnographic study. Nonetheless, the research design followed other central aspects of ethnographic research. For instance, the use of “a range of sources of data, through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts” (Atkinson/Hammersley 2007: 3), as well as the study of people’s actions and accounts in everyday contexts, rather than under conditions created by the researcher – such as in experimental setups or in highly structured interview situations. While the research design undergirding the present study involved structured interviews (particularly to gather “everyday work stories”), in

later phases of the research extensive use was made of informal interview settings and relatively unstructured “ethnographic” interviews (Spradley 1976) that focused on the use of specific instruments and on specific situations. These can at best be described as “as a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants” (Spradley 1976: 58). Another similarity to ethnographic research traditions was the application of data collection procedures which – similarly to grounded theory – did “not involve following through a fixed and detailed research design specified at the start (but) they are generated out of the process of data analysis” (Atkinson/Hammersley 2007: 3). Following the perspective of institutional ethnography, typical processes of inquiry involved the examination of specific work processes in situ with a study of the involved texts and documents and focused interviews on that specific work process. Nevertheless, the employed research strategy also differed to certain extent with a typical ethnographic study: While the latter usually focus on an in-depth description of a whole setting, and usually seeks “detailed knowledge of the multiple dimensions of life within the studied milieu” (Charmaz 2006: 21), Grounded theory “gives priority to the studied *phenomenon* or *process-rather* than to a description of a setting” (Charmaz 2006: 22). The selection of specific scenes, early involvement in memo-writing and coding and systematic comparison of data and emerging categories (Charmaz/Mitchell 2001: 161) are specificities of grounded theory that were extensively employed in this study. While the combination of interview-data, data from field observations and document analysis is neither unusual in ethnographic research (see e.g. Atkinson/Hammersley 2007: 78) nor in Grounded Theory Research, it is necessary to describe why such a multimodal approach constitutes an adequate fit for the research question at stake. In addition to the theoretical reflections on practices in the previous chapter, the need for an approach that focusses both on the researchers description of people’s behavior and the accounts they provide is highlighted by Atkinson and Hammersley: “Equally important, (than the researchers’ descriptions of people’s behavior, of what they do and say in various circumstances, and of their own experience of participation in setting, added, S.D.) though, are the accounts that people in the setting provide, while being observed or in interviews” (Atkinson/Hammersley 2007: 96). Atkinson and Hammersley propose to read interviews in two analytical ways: “First, [...] for what they tell us about the phenomena to which they refer. Second, [...] in terms of the perspectives they imply, the discursive strategies they employ” (Atkinson/Hammersley 2007: 98). Lamont and Swidler provide an in-depth reflection on the respective epistemic strengths and weaknesses of ethnographic observation and interview research and provide a convincing argument for a combined approach. While “Ethnographers have privileged access to the immediate interactional situation and to many local codes or aspects of interactional style that may not be available to an interviewer” (Lamont/Swidler 2014: 160), “important aspects of “situations” are often not visible



to the direct observer of interactions” (ibid.). The authors thus provide a “situationist” argument for the need to recur to interview-based methods – as a specific tool to gather information on the “actor’s larger situation” (ibid.). Lamont and Swidler give the example of awareness of one’s access to family help in an emergency situation, obligations to kin, etc.) that “may not be observable in the interactional situation” (ibid.: 160). From the background of what has been said in the previous chapter, one should add that the four features that, according to Schatzki, make up the structure of practice (general understandings, rules, teleological understandings) are part of the “larger” situation, that reaches beyond the actual “practicing”. As Lamont and Swidler conclude, “interviews, then, can sometimes reveal more relevant features of reality than immediate observation can, simply because they empower the researcher to probe about facts or about ideal responses or situations, as well as imaginary scenarios and fantasies that simply are not visible in everyday life” (Lamont/Swidler 2014: 160). These theoretical preliminary considerations are reflected in the data collection and research design of the present study. As such, a combination of interviews with frontline professionals and managers, an analysis of documents, performance agreements, evaluation forms, registration sheets, legal documents, and short-time ethnographic observations of key processes in the organizations where combined.

### 5.1.2. Interviews, “Everyday Work Stories” and Participant Observation

The initial interviews with frontline professionals where semi-structured guided interviews that followed a theoretically informed interview guideline. This means that a few broad, open-ended questions were devised to encourage open, narrative and unanticipated statements. Follow-up interview questions then invited for a detailed discussion of specific topics. The decision for semi-structured interviews (vs. un-structured, open interviews) followed a research process that was purposefully not based on a systematic fading out of theoretical knowledge (as is for instance demanded in specific ethno-theories or in classical phenomenology) but that tried to keep (broad) theoretical knowledge aware in terms of “sensitizing concepts” (Blumer 1954), without letting theoretical preconceptions constrict the view of the researcher. The choice of the method is appropriate for this task, as “one of the great strengths of qualitative interviewing is that it can combine the depth of understanding with purposeful, systematic, analytic research design to answer theoretically motivated questions” (Lamont/Swidler 2014: 159). This followed Grounded Theory methodology insofar as “sensitizing concepts and general disciplinary perspectives” (Charmaz 2006: 11) are used for the opening research questions and the opening research problem. These perspectives also found an entry in the sampling of research participants and the choice of settings to be accessed via participant observation. As questions of frontline implementation of policies

and the translation of life-course-related normality patterns through and in interactions constituted the initial research question, interviews with management-level staff of the measure, the funding agency but mainly with personal counselors that take care of the follow-up of young participants where conducted. Starting from this initial sampling, further respondents were selected based on “theoretical sampling” (Glaser/Strauss 2008). This follows the idea of “parallelism” of data collection, interpretation and the construction of theory, as it is purported in Grounded Theory (Strübing 2004: 15). For instance, during the research process, specific situated arrangements during people processing activities seemed to be focal points that needed a deeper investigation (for instance, the negotiation of the “integration contract” and those group settings in which the “portfolio” was filled in). In later phases of the research process, participant observation of these “central sites” of activation has been pursued and a series of smaller “follow-up” interviews on specific documents, processes and key situations have been conducted. While the initial interviews had a more formal character and usually involved a distinct setting (usually a 1-1,5-hour interview in an empty office at the premises of the measure). The follow-up interviews often had the character of spontaneous, informal conversations during other activities. They often had the character of ethnographic interviews (Spradley 1979) involving very concrete task- and activity-related questions. Some interviews involved “mini-tour questions” and “hypothetical interaction questions” (Spradley 1979: 87), asking the respondents about specific practices and processes (e.g. “Could you describe what you do when you fill out that form with a young person? If you were talking to a young person about that sanction, would you put it that way?”).

The initial formal interviews conducted with the frontline workers can be described as a kind of modified “expert interview” (Meuser/Nagel 1991; Meuser and Nagel 2009). The qualification as “expert interviews” highlights that for initial contact, the informants have been addressed in their status as active participants in a specific function that these persons perform in their role as professionals. In expert interviews, the informants are primarily interviewed as the “carrier of a specific function, not as a private person” (Meuser/Nagel 2009: 469). The expert stands for a specific perspective on a problem that is typical for a specific institutional context in which he acts. This does not mean that these interviews aimed at gathering only the reflexively accessible knowledge (in the sense of clearly, reflexively communicable expert knowledge). They also aimed at collecting “a-theoretical” experiential knowledge (Meuser/Nagel 2009: 475), to be reconstructed on the basis of the transcribed material. This distinction between different knowledge forms is of crucial importance. Bogner and Menz (2002b: 43f.) distinguish between “technical knowledge”, “process knowledge” and “interpretative knowledge”, which gradually differ according to their immediate communicability. While technical knowledge refers to the classical “expert knowledge” in the sense of more

abstract scientifically legitimated knowledge, process knowledge refers to knowledge acquired in practical experience sedimented in interaction routines and processes. “interpretation knowledge” (ibid.) designates the pre-theoretical experiential knowledge that cannot simply be queried. It must be reconstructed based on specific case-decisions, or higher-order action orientations that must be reconstructed based on a transcribed interview. While Meuser and Nagel’s concept of the “expert interview” claims to apply an open, reconstructive method, some scholars argue that it is a rather formalistic method of analysis is closer to content-analytical methods (e.g. Mayring 2008) rather than to methods that focus on an in-depth hermeneutic reconstruction (see e.g. Bogner/Menz 2005, Krause 2014: 173). In short, these authors argue that Meuser and Nagel’s concept would use an “archaeological” model, in which the expert is seen as a context-free provider of objective knowledge (Bogner/Menz 2005) and where expert interviews are mainly used as a “quarry” for illustrative and anecdotal material. These authors argue, differently than Meuser and Nagel, that the special knowledge that experts dispose of does not necessarily have to be reflexively present: they posit the existence of “implicit knowledge” that is “unwritten laws and decision-principles [...] these implicit rules of routine action, the habits and traditions are not to be directly queried but need to be reconstructed” (Bogner/Menz 2005: 42 cited in Krause 2014: 174, own translation). I follow Bogner and Menz (2005) in their differentiation between (reflexive) technical knowledge (specific rules of action and routines, bureaucratic procedures, etc.) “process knowledge” (constructions of meaning and explanation patterns) as well as “interpretive knowledge”. The latter refers to “implicit practical knowledge” that lies “beneath” the interview text and transcends the interview Situation and therefore requires special attention through adequate methodological analysis. For Bogner and Menz, this means that the method of interpretation must take into consideration the interview dynamics as an interactive accomplishment and focus, beneath the “content” of expert knowledge (the archaeological “what” question) on the interaction dynamics (the “how” question) and thus the situative, contextual indexical subtext of meaning. The latter requires to pay attention to the interactive manufacturing of meaning that lies “beneath” the simple content of words and their correspondence to the “real world”. Ethnomethodological scholarship and the so-called pragmatic turn has extensively shown that meaning is mainly constructed in the indexical subtext of speech acts. As such, the analysis will have to account beyond the “content” (what) – on the “how”, this the communicative practices in the interview accounts that can only be analyzed through looking at “the fine-grained detail of talk-interaction” (Drew 2001: 267). The described limitations of interviews have been critically reflected upon for the interview-design and their conduct. The interview guideline thus focused both on the formal aspects of their work but also aimed at yielding everyday work stories, examples of cases and situations that come as narratives (rather than descriptive and argumentative accounts).

To foster such narrative sections, Interviews started with an open question about the respondent's professional background and their role/career at the organization, their specific functions within the organization, the content of their work, etc. The main part of the interview followed the structure of the interview guideline. Nevertheless, the interview guideline devised the "broad topics" of the interview rather than concrete questions. In addition, the interviewees have been invited to each question to narrate exemplary cases and describe concrete situations they encountered in their work. These multi-layered "everyday work stories" (Maynard-Moody/Musheno 2003: 25) aimed at providing rich narrative accounts containing subjective relevancies and "native" categories relevant in the field. These storytelling phases allowed to go beyond a purely descriptive stance towards the knowledge of the professionals. These stories "re-create their world as they see it and as they want to present it to outsiders" (Maynard-Moody/Musheno 2003: 26). As such they are not a simple photographically accurate "doubling" of their perceived objective reality, but they entail decision on "what and how to present" (ibid.) in order to make them intelligible and accountable for the interviewer. Their limitation (these stories are neither fact nor evidence) is as well their strength (because they provide – when analyzed appropriately – clues on those societal interpretation patterns and registers of meaning that must be activated in order that these cases "make sense"). The value of stories – may they be about cases, situations, or processes – have been acknowledged to be a valuable source in organization studies, too (see e.g. Weick 1995: 60-61, Weick/Suthcliffe/Obstfeld 2005: 415). As for instance, Czarniawska describes, collecting stories from the organization floor gives access to the "never-ending construction of meaning in organizations" (Czarniawska 1998: 14), containing both practices of organisational sense-making, but also allows a prime access to the meaning of actions and events of the research participants: "Most narratives do not simply report events but rather give a teller's perspective" (Cortazzi 2001: 384) as told stories invariably contain an "evaluation structure" that presents the "speaker's perspective or judgment on the events, marking off the most important part" (Cortazzi 2001: 384).

An additional strategy for gathering rich material consisted of focusing on the "practical concerns" (Nicolini 2013: 224) that frontline agents deemed to realize in their work. These practical concerns are akin to Schatzki's "teleo-affective structuring" (see previous chapter) and are to be conceived as something that is inherent a practice itself, that "govern and affect all participants" (Nicolini 2013: 225) rather than individual values, beliefs or inner motives that supposedly guide the conduct of practitioners. The interview guideline thus included a slightly adapted version of Nicolini's "interview to the double"<sup>3</sup>, an interview technique designed to "represent

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3 Nicolini's "interview to the double" consists in a technique that requires interviewees to imagine that they have a double who will have to show up at their job the next day. The interviewee

both the going concerns of the practitioners and the local lexicon of accountability that all members have to learn in order to produce conduct which is observable and reportable” (Nicolini 2013: 225). The latter technique proved to be quite successful in prompting the research participants to describe implicit, informal “ways of doing things” that were not formalized in institutional rules. The research strategy, and more particularly, the data collection focalized not abstract principles of action or general guidelines but tried to match – as much as possible – concrete “situations”, everyday processes and local interaction settings and where thus rather geared towards analysing the ways in which professionals dealt with, interpreted and acted in complex arrangements.

Due to specific time constraints, a long-term ethnographic participant observation period was not realizable. Particularly during the most interesting phases (the first month after enrolment in the measure) I have not been allowed to do a longer-term participant observation due to the high workload during this period. The management of the measure granted me access outside of that period for single days on the condition that frontline agents would individually agree. After having established a deeper contact with several frontline-agents during the conduct of interviews, I was allowed to “shadow” their work for selected days. The selected days did not follow a fixed schedule, rather, I contacted the frontline agents individually shortly after the interview (a procedure obviously agreed upon by the management) and asked them if I could follow their work for specific situations or tasks. As I disposed of the weekly programs of the measure, I had a blunt overview of specific events and program elements. This allowed asking for participant observation in specific settings. Some of the participant observation that took place in one-to-one counseling settings were harder to negotiate. I asked only four research participants (of which I had the impression that they were potentially open to my proposal) if they would allow me to participate in the counseling session, of which one denied. The others agreed on the condition that the young person agrees. As the young persons seemed to know who I was and what I did in the field, this required only few explanations. In a few cases, I was asked beforehand not to participate in the counseling session. As I had disclosed my interest to describe the “processing of cases” (I told the research participants that I was interested in “what happens, from the beginning to the end”), participants often prompted me to elements of the

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wee “is then asked to provide necessary detailed instructions that will insure that the plot is not unveiled or unmasked” (Nicolini 2013: 225). For my research purposes, I slightly adapted this interview technique and asked respondents to imagine the hypothetical situation that a colleague that just arrived from university would have to do their job tomorrow, and then ask for detailed instructions (and the most important things to “watch out” for) so everything goes well.

program that could be interesting for me. My presence during the group-based everyday activities required no explanation – the presence of persons that are not part of the regular staff (interns, members of the neighboring measure for young adults) was nothing uncommon. Nevertheless, I had the impression that my presence was seen as something special: on the one side, everybody “knew” that I was coming at a specific day for doing observations (letting me suppose that my regular visit is subject to internal communication) on the other side, my participation in the lunch meeting (the Team used to pass lunch-break together) was seen as normal. This allowed me to make appointments for conducting smaller, “ethnographic” (Spradley 1976) interviews or for directly asking emerging questions. During my field visits, I was able to observe counseling sessions, guided group-work sessions on different topics (testing, vocational choice, work on the “portfolio”) as well as one-to-one support for writing applications and for the preparation of phone calls to potential employers. While the group-settings allowed for instant note-taking (most participants where using pen and pencil anyway). I had to wait for a quiet moment to take notes on observations in the counseling and the everyday interaction settings. I tried to follow Emerson et. al’s (1995) advice to take jottings every half an hour and instantly after important events. I tried to provide as detailed accounts of the observed scenes and noted the accounts of participants, that where written up into full fieldnotes a day later. Due to the restricted field access and the perceived impossibility to re-negotiate a longer observation period (I felt like I already asked too much) I quickly concluded to utilize the material gathered by participant observation only as a supplement and cross-validation for the data collected through interviews and document analysis. As I took this decision quite at the beginning of the research process, I quickly decided to be more selective regarding the observation of specific settings. In doing so, I tried to include specific “key moments” of people processing in my observations (for instance the “enactment” of a sanction or the “use” of specific documents in practice). This material often confirmed my initial intuition that these moments are relevant. Unfortunately, I rarely was given the possibility to conduct repeated participant observations of these situations, leaving me with insufficient material for a systematic analysis. The analysis conducted in this research is thus primarily based on interview transcripts rather than based on the field notes of the participant observation. Nevertheless, these field notes were used as supplementary material for the process of “constant comparison” (Charmaz 2006) where they have been compared against interview passages or specific documents and where they served as additional material for testing the development of specific theoretic categories and hypotheses.

### 5.1.3. Analysis of Documents and Texts

The present study drew heavily on the analysis of institutional documents and Texts. While Texts are often analyzed mainly in their content, as a kind of objectified window for reality, I propose – in line with Prior that “documents need to be considered as situated products, rather than as fixed and stable ‘things’ in the world” (Prior 2003: 27). The interest in texts in the present study draws on the intuition of institutional ethnography approaches that contend that much of human activity in institutionalized contexts is “textually mediated” (Smith 2005). Texts are a main (material) and enduring feature of a concrete “situation”, the analysis of the “larger situation” (Lamont/Swidler 2014: 160) can heavily draw on texts. Particularly standardized documents which are heavily used in everyday work of frontline professionals can be thought of as “standardized artifacts” (Wolff 2004: 284) that bear “institutional traces” allowing to make inferences on the “activities, intentions and ideas of the creators of the document as well as the organizations they represent” (Wolff 2004: 284). In the same vein, institutional ethnography highlights that texts are an ideal starting point for analyzing “ruling relations” (Smith 2005) as they regulate local practices through establishing connections to dominant, extra-local political and economic programs: “Texts [...] are mechanisms for coordinating activity across many different sites [...] institutional ethnographies are designed to reveal the organizing power of texts, making visible just how activities in local settings are coordinated and managed extralocally” (Devault 2006: 294). These ruling relations do not only operate through prescriptive rules, but they carry – as Nicolini puts it – “the script their designers embodied into them, and for this reason, they convey a particular culture of action. As a result, cultural artifacts constitute a means of transmission of social knowledge by carrying inscribed within them objectified norms of cognition, assumptions about how work should be carried out and the purposes of their use” (Nicolini 2013: 228). Documents have the potential to pre-figure institutional practice. A document suggests specific ways of using it, contains and highlights potentially institutionally relevant categories, and highlights specific local doings and saying as an “institutionally actionable” (Smith 2005) reality. To be clear: documents do not unilaterally define the practice. Rather, as research on medical records has shown, they have the potential to impact and transform social interaction while being “continually subordinated to the contingent requirements of the actual tasks” (Berg 1996: 501). In my research I did seldom look at the concrete use of the document “in action” but I focused on its programmatic and institutional traces contained in documents. Documents can be conceived of as “institutional scripts” that “streamline(s), organize(s) include(s) and exclude(s) information by instructing staff [...] to attend to certain themes and categories of information” (Berrick et al.: 2018: 41, brackets added, S.D.). The concept of institutional script focusses both the encoding of the script into institutional principles as

well as its concrete organizational enactment. Institutional scripts constitute “observable, recurrent activities and patterns of interaction characteristic of a particular setting” (Barley/Tolbert: 1997: 98). Hasenfeld argues that these scripts highlight both “how organizations select and establish rules that guide their work and how these rules become enacted in everyday activities” (Hasenfeld 2010 cited in Berrick et.al. 2018: 44). In a similar vein, the sociology of conventions highlights the role of extra-situative supports for the coordination of actions: In his article the conventional foundations of action, Dodier (1995) shows that situative coordination may also call upon external supports, thus “technical objects, texts, rules, words, that carry within them, in the form of records, elements that are recognizable by those taking part in an interaction” (Dodier 1995: 150). Dodier explicitly mentions material “objects” (such as documents, medical records or technical objects) that are part of the conventional matrix of a situation and are activated in the practical activities of the frontline agents. In referring to Dorothy Smith’s concept of “institutional ethnography” (Smith 2005; Nadai 2012), the twofold focus on texts and on everyday activities allows hooking the local to the extra-local, thus to bridge everyday action with the “institutional order” that governs such activities. Institutional ethnographies “are built from the examination of work processes and study of how they are coordinated, typically through texts and discourses of various sorts” (Devault 2006: 294). Smith argues that texts allow prime access to the “objectification of organizations and institutions and to how they exist as such” (Smith 2001: 159) and that they allow exploring “how texts enter into people’s local practices of working, drawing, reading, looking and so on. They must be examined as they coordinate people’s activities” (Smith 2001: 159). As such, texts offer, beyond the usual focus of ethnographic methods on participant observation a possibility to analyze how people in a concrete situation align their activities with relevancies and goals produced elsewhere. For instance, in institutional ethnography, textually mediated procedures are found to “subordinate people’s experience to the institutional” (Smith 2005: 187). Institutional realities are thus not simply “there”, but are structured through specific frames, concepts and categories that are partly embedded in texts who “are central in subordinating individual subjectivities to institutionally generated realities” (Smith 2005: 187-88). Particularly in people processing organizations, people routinely conduct their work through texts. In the vocabulary of institutional ethnography, texts are “activated” (Campbell/Gregor 2004: 33), meaning the “human involvement in the capacity of texts to coordinate action” (ibid.). They do not work by themselves, but they “activated” through humans. For instance, the intake evaluation form of the analyzed transition measure focusses on an evaluation of previous labor-market experience, school grades, etc. – information formats that coordinate the action of frontline professionals with the gate-keeping criteria of the apprenticeship-market. This “hooking” (Smith 2001) of the local everyday activities with the extra-local catches up with organizational theory that highlights



the role of the “organizational environment” (Meyer/Rowan 1977), that for instance pursue a “loose coupling” of organizational practices with their environment, or with of conceptions that break with over-coordinated view of organizations focusing on bureaucratic rules, shared representations and common cultures (see. e.g. Thévenot 2001) and focus on the situative coordination of actions in the wake of a complex conventional arrangement. The focus on the micro-level situative coordination of action through different conventional forms of grasping reality (Thévenot) or on loose coupling with the institutional environment (Meyer and Rowan) that is discussed in depth in chapter four finds its methodological operationalization in the specific theoretical sensitivity that Dorothy Smiths Institutional Ethnography comes with: Texts, so it goes, are “present as part of the work, and at the same time they are present to coordinate the local work of nursing assistants and residents with the institutional regime of the nursing home management, with the welfare system and municipal departments responsible for standards of care in seniors’ residences, and so on. They appear in, as well as organize, the everyday working lives” (Smith 2005: 179).

We thus draw at least a double perspective on texts and documents: On the one side they are key to reconstructing an institutional order – they constitute unquestioned accounts of what is made relevant in a specific institutional context, of what is seen as relevant for the “people processing” activities of the organization. In doing so, texts and documents do not depict a “true” or “false” reflection of the reality they describe, but they construct an “institutional reality”. It is the processes and conventions through which this institutional reality is constructed that lies at the center of interest of this study. Such a perspective is also purported by Atkinson and Coffey, who propose to view documents as social facts “in that they are produced, shared and used in socially organized ways. They are not, however, transparent representations of organizational routines, decision-making processes, or professional diagnoses. They construct particular kinds of representations using their own conventions” (Atkinson/Coffey 2004: 58). In the same vein, Ten Have (2004) distinguishes between a “factist” and a “specimen” perspective on documents, whereas in the first, documents “are only a means to get hopefully adequate information about some reality external to them” (Ten Have 2004: 90) and in the latter “documents are studied as part of societal processes of documentation” (ibid.) with a focus on the document itself, “its structure, the various textual devices used to construct it, etc.” (ibid. 105). Ten have distinguishes a third approach of studying texts in which through studying “writing and reading” (ibid. 106) textual devices can be investigated in action and where “the actual practices in which and through which documents are produced and used, as part of more encompassing activities” (ibid.) as in current workplace studies (Luff/Hindmarsh/Heath 2000). The present study – while being sensitive to the potential uses of and practical activities of production involved in specific textual devices – is not based on

*in situ* observation of documents in use, it nevertheless attempts to look at how the latter format reality and act as devices for hooking the local with the extra-local.

On the other side – as is reflected in the theoretical toolbox of institutional ethnography (see above) texts and documents have a function of coordinating local practices with larger “extra-local” (Smith 2001) contexts and are embedded within particular “ruling relations” (*ibid.*) – that is – they are imbued with power relations. Latour has coined the term “inscription” (Akrich/Latour 1992: 259) to designate the fact that material artifacts (such as documents) carry specific action programs inscribed by the designer, the manufacturer, etc. While Latour and Akrich have classic objects in mind (for instance a hotel room key with a weight attached to them, the weight is the inscription that translates the message “bring back the keys to the front door”), the same applies for institutional forms and documents as they may carry “inscriptions” of different actors and stakeholders. Recent research on the use of inscriptions in everyday work-settings shows that these also bundle the interests of different relevant actors and stakeholders. As Roth and McGinn describe, while being contingent upon their reading in the context of particular moments of interpretation, inscriptions serve particular interests: “inscriptions are usually crafted to be relevant to particular purposes, inscriptions are matters of practical, political, and economic choice” (Roth/McGinn: 1998: 45). This applies particularly to workplaces, where “inscriptions are produced to keep track of people, objects, information, money, organs, and so on. At the same time, these inscriptions are used to hold those who produced them accountable: inscriptions are used by auditors to reconstruct “what has happened” and, occasionally, to lay blame” (Roth/McGinn 1998 45).

An example: The “table of fault and sanctions” (analyzed in depth in chapter 6.2) describes the specific penalties a frontline agent should express in case of a specific infringement of rules (for instance coming late repeatedly). The document comes with the affordance of signaling specific misconduct to a digital general attendance list that gathers information of all absences and to inform the public employment service once a sanction is imposed. While the document contains a general if-then rule, this rule requires situated interpretation when applied in an interactive setting in which the life-practice of a participant is analyzed from specific institutional classifications. It contains thus a “rule” as a structural feature of practices (Schatzki 2006: 1863, see above) that – as will be shown in chapter 6, establishes a horizon which prefigures<sup>4</sup> practices of sanctioning, but which – when applied to ever-changing situations and cases requires a considerable amount of

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4 Akrich and Latour (1992: 261) speak of “affordances” and “allowances” of devices to highlight that a device both “allows/permits” and “forbids/prescribes” specific courses of action. See also the similarities with Schatzki’s concept of “prefiguration” described at the beginning of this chapter.

creation, invention and improvisation. In addition, the document links local practices to a specific regime of accountability, in this case, a specific article of the unemployment law, (§30, defining the duties of unemployed) and to the local public employment service (once issued, a sanction must be processed to the legal office of the PES). As Prior suggests, documents are not simply written materials, they also involve “fields, frames and networks of action” (Prior 2003: 2). The “table of faults and sanctions” (see chapter 6) as well as many other of the documents thus also serve as “boundary objects” (Star/Griesemer 1989) to articulate different social worlds. In the case of the social world of the public employment service, the social world of the Motivational Semester, and the social world of potential employers the table of fault and sanctions and the accompanying standardized form serves as a standard protocol uniform in content across all Motivational Semesters in Switzerland, that “Serve(s) as (an) interface between multiple social worlds and facilitate(s) the flow of resources (information, concepts, skills, materials) among multiple social actors” (Roth/McGinn 1998: 42). Just like Roth and McGinn describe for a standardized “organ donor tracking tool” utilized in hospitals, the table of fault and sanctions coordinates the activities in several social sites *despite* “considerably different local practices that adjust activities to fit local-level variables” (*ibid.*). In the case of sanctions these local level variables are manifold: the specific “offense”, the track record of the young person, training and preference of the personal counselor. The sanctioning form does nevertheless not achieve standardization of practices in each site – where the boundary object is reinterpreted and accommodated. The “instructions” of the sanctioning tool “like instructions in other contexts” (Suchman 1987), cannot predetermine the exact nature of the actions they specify” (Roth/McGinn 1998: 43) – but facilitates the articulation of varying practices.

During the research process, the following documents have been analyzed, some more, some less intensively, some with a focus on semantic content and prescriptive rules, some with a focus on institutional scripts and rules. Documents that found ample use in practice (mainly assessment forms and administrative forms) were mainly analyzed in their potential to pre-figure practices and in terms of the inherent frames, concepts, and categories. Both categories of documents were also assessed in their potential to “hook” the local to extra-local contexts, thus in terms of the embodied ruling relations.

- Document “conditions of participation”, handed out to and signed by first-time participants of the measure (Document 1)
- Document “circular letter on active labor market policies”, containing information about the specific ways in which the regulations of the Unemployment insurance law are to be implemented into Motivational Semesters. (Document 2)

- Document “service agreement/contract notice” between the providing organization and the public employment service that finances the measure describing the funding modalities, the minimal criteria to which the measure must comply, the target group, objectives and content of the measure as well as specific quality development processes and the information flow about clients (Document 3).
- Document “intake evaluation form” covering information on the school and labor-market trajectory of the client (Document 4)
- Document “table of faults and sanctions”, containing the sanctioning criteria as they figure in the unemployment insurance law into a handout for the use of frontline workers and describes with what penalties specific behaviors should be sanctioned (Document 5)
- Document “portfolio” A 50-page Document that contains exercises, forms, and questionnaires used as a continuous worksheet in the different phases of the guidance and job-search process involving both the work of clients and of frontline professionals (Document 6.)

#### 5.1.4. Data Analysis Strategies

The analysis of data was inspired by Grounded Theory Methodology and consisted of an iterative process between inductive and deductive phases of analysis. Data collection and the development of initial codes, categories, and hypotheses were followed by a phase of data collection based on a theoretical sampling, that subsequently informed the development of hypotheses and concepts. I tried to get involved in the writing of theoretical memos as soon as possible. Even though the construction of the interview guideline was already based on specific theoretical concepts, I tried to construct the analytic codes and categories from data, not from the theoretical prior knowledge that informed the construction of the guideline. It is only after the first round of interpretation in which each interview was interpreted on its own terms (constant comparison was only allowed within sequential comparison of the same interview and incidents), that a cross case-comparison, as well as a more systematic integration of concepts and categories, took place. For this purpose, all interviews were fully transcribed. In the first step I created a detailed paraphrase of each interview that closely described the thematic course of the interview. The interviews were each individually coded into themed subsections. This process was facilitated using the qualitative data analysis software MaxQDA. These paraphrases encompassed larger bits of the interview but stayed very closed to the exact wording of the interviewed persons. During this first step,

I also identified and coded text passages with a high density of meaning<sup>5</sup> that contained narrative elements for later in-depth analysis and a -line-by-line interpretation. The result of this first step was a “portrait” (saved as a Memo in MAXQDA) for each interview, document or fieldnote that contained a short thematic description, key topics, as well as an overview of the narrative sequences. The latter procedure allowed to gain a first overview of the full corpus of data and of relevant topics. These case-portraits were the basis for sequential in-depth analysis of selected narrative passages. The initial selection of these passages was guided by a more inductive process – I started with those sequences that seemed to be particularly relevant to the respondents or that were of specific relevance for the research question. For the in-depth analysis of these narrative sequences, the fieldnotes and the documents, I deviated from the grounded theory version of analysis of interview data as early coding and “splitting up” the data in smaller chunks does not allow to pay attention to the formal structure of the interview or an interaction (pauses, interlaps), and the turn-taking and sequence of utterances between the interviewer and interviewee. As Silverman comments, in Grounded Theory, “What interviewees say tends to be treated as offering a more or less transparent picture of their internal meanings. This ignores the way in which talk performs a range of *actions* that can be comprehended without reference to speakers’ inner states” (Silverman 2015:127). Similarly, Ten Have describes that “In the activity of ‘coding’, so central to GT, the significance of the data – which in themselves are already representations of some original events – is reduced to their function of providing an indication of a concept” (Ten Have 2004: 146). The deviation from the “standard” Grounded-Theory process is in line with a more hermeneutical and sequential process of interpretation, where the clarification of the everyday understanding of the transcript on the level of the word, sentence, and speech-turn took place. In a second step, varying experimental interpretations then have been formulated “under the strict obligation that they are based exclusively on the evidence in the texts” (Knoblauch/Luckmann 2004: 304). This process of tentative development of different “versions”, of different possible interpretations by systematically varying the wording of a sequence, the sound of the words, and by contrasting a word, an utterance or a sequence with other possible utterances that would make sense in the same context, but where not expressed is inspired by the method of objective

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5 I followed Nohl’s (2009: 64) criteria for the choice of interview passages for in depth-analysis. Nohl proposes to choose those interview passages that 1.) are relevant for the research question 2.) that contain a “metaphorical denseness” (These were sections of the interviews that had the character of narratives, but also sections where the respondents suddenly accelerated, spoke faster or louder, or contain key, essential, striking, odd, interesting things) 3.) Their suitability for comparative analysis (thus topics that emerged in several interviews).

hermeneutics<sup>6</sup> (see e.g. Oevermann 1979). The “*sequential analysis* of each individual contribution to an interaction, step by step, without clarifying in advance the internal or external context of the utterance” (Reichertz 2004: 291, emphasis in original quote) has been used as a tool for systematically blending out contextual knowledge and a priori knowledge and for gaining access to the “taken for granted” meanings and assumptions of the interviewees that make interaction possible. After the in-depth analysis of a few selected interview passages, I equipped them with a code. After this step, thematically similar interview passages from different interviews were compared and the codes were refined to identify systematize cross-cutting topics. During this process, first theoretical memos have been written which developed hypotheses and interpretation patterns to be followed up in further analysis and to be compared with similar and different cases. In this process of “constant comparison” (Charmaz 2006), elements of the document analysis (either if the direct reference to them was made to them or when referring to specific legal categories, organizational processes, and bureaucratic rules were implicit) were included in the subsumption of codes into larger categories. This thematic comparison of different interviews and topics tried to give dimensions to the earlier identified topics and aimed at “condensing” the data to fewer central categories. At this point, initial memos were re-written and recast to fit better to the data. Nevertheless, until now, I refrained from a theoretical abstraction of the data in order to give more density to the concepts and to scrutinize the categories and concepts by constantly comparing them to different segments of the interview<sup>7</sup>. It

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6 Kleemann et. al (2014) propose a “standard module” of interpretation where basic steps of conversation analysis, objective hermeneutics and narrative analysis are blended into common steps of data analysis. They identify the systematic variation of meanings and contexts as a central step that is applied in each of these methods (albeit with slight differences). Indeed, as C.A. focusses on turn-taking and the ongoing maintenance of intersubjective understanding, a focus on the publicly displayed meaning (thus, focusing on the transcribed text instead of recurring to “external” explanations (e.g. intrapsychic processes, the “identity of a speaker etc) a word-by word sequential analysis is advised. In a specific way, this is also acknowledged by Grounded Theory. For instance, Charmaz describes the process of “word by word-analysis as a process that “forces you to attend to images and meanings. You may attend to the structure and flow of words, and how both affect the sense you make of them, as well as their specific content” (Charmaz 2006: 5). While GTM thus displays a certain sensitivity for the ongoing construction of meaning, it is “category-based” (v.s. case-based) and proceeds very early to splitting up the text into codes and categories. Particularly the “everyday work stories” (Maynard-Moody/Musheno 2003) of the interviewees where displayed in “narrative” form, so that an early “splitting up” through coding and categorisation was not seen as a viable strategy.

7 In this first open-coding process, I followed Glaser’s suggestion to orient oneself to basic social processes. Glaser suggest to ask oneself the following questions: “ ‘What is this data a study of?’, ‘What category does this incident indicate?’, What is actually happening in the

is only after a certain saturation of the system of codes and categories that I began to detach my analysis from the wording of the interviewees and to describe similarities and differences by reference to theoretical knowledge. It is only at this point that a reference to the ethnographic field notes and the documentary analysis has been established. This served to perform a recursive comparison of how professionals dealt with the sometimes-contradictory goal orientations and institutional contradictions that were previously identified in the organizational make-up of the measure. For the analysis of documents, I followed the same basic process than the interview passages but adapted them through including the suggestions of Atkinson and Hammersley<sup>8</sup> (1995: 142) the propositions of Wolff<sup>9</sup> (2004) and the detailed analytic questions of Charmaz<sup>10</sup> (2006: 39-40). The further process was guided by a continuous succession of inductive and deductive steps, through the data analysis and coding, new hypotheses and theoretical memos were established (inductive), which then led to collecting new data on the basis of these hypotheses (deductive). Codes and categories were continuously validated and further-developed through constant comparison (initially, through comparing data with data, later through

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data?, 'What is the main concern being faced by the participants?', and 'What accounts for the continual resolving of this concern?' (Glaser, 1998: 140).

- 8 Atkinson and Hammersley propose Questions to ask about documents that allow to develop queues for analysis: "How are documents written? How are they read? Who writes them? Who reads them? For what purposes? On what occasions? With what outcomes? What is recorded? What is omitted? What is taken for granted? What does the writer seen to take for granted about the reader(s)? What do readers need to know in order to make sense of them?" (Hammersley/Atkinson 1995: 142-143)
- 9 Wolff (2004), based on an ethnomethodological analytic strategy proposes some practical strategies of bestrangement and analytic focusses, for instance the description of the display of information, formal characteristics of the document, the semantic content, the (graphical) display of information and their effects), and so on.
- 10 Charmaz (2006: 39-40) provides a wide range of analytic questions, of which only those retained for the analysis are displayed here: "How was the text produced? By whom? What is the ostensible purpose of the text? Might the text serve other unstated or assumed purposes? Which ones? How does the text represent what its author(s) assumed to exist? Which meanings are embedded within it? How do those meanings reflect a particular social, historical, and perhaps organizational context? What is the structure of the text? How does its structure shape what is said? Which categories can you discern in its structure? What can you glean from these categories? Do the categories change in sequential texts over time? How so? Which contextual meanings does the text imply? How does its content construct images of reality? Which realities does the text claim to represent? How does it represent them? What, if any, unintended information and meanings might you see in the text? Which rules govern the construction of the text? How can you discern them in the narrative? How do these rules reflect both tacit assumptions and explicit meanings? How might they be related to other data on the same topic? Who benefits from the text? Why? (Charmaz 2006: 39-40)

comparing codes and categories and establishing links between them), then and integrated into larger concepts. The recourse to theoretical concepts mainly happened on the Level of Memos, I tried – wherever possible – to construct analytic codes and categories solely from data. Once several codes could be linked to a theoretical Memo (and hence – to a sensitizing concept, an initial idea or a clear-cut theory) I went back into the data to eventually re-code interview passages and bits of data according to this new theoretical lens. This process can most easily be described by an example: An extensive narrative of one respondent on the difficulties to balance the demands of the funding office and own professional and ethical standards in the interactive practice was coded with the in-vivo code “wearing different hats”. In the first step, the same interview was re-read for further passages that contained descriptions of conflicting demands and their experience. Then, passages of a second interview that contained similar descriptions were coded. Here, the balancing of different institutional demands and injunctions was described as a matter of incompatible goals that required a form of “information management” (in-vivo code) in a complex mosaic of accountability. These two codes were integrated into the concept of “conflicts between different institutional demands”. In a theoretical Memo attached to both codes, I tried to describe the different regimes of accountability, the strategies the frontline agents employed to deal with them and tried to describe them in theoretical terms. In this process, I found the concept of “articulation work” and of “invisible work” to designate “Work” that is required to keep things going on that is not represented in rationalised models of Work. The Memo then also contained prompts on what to look for in other interviews: Did the interviewees have different strategies to deal with conflicting demands? Where some of them not describing the same topic as a relevant issue? In What situations would such an “articulation work” be particularly urgent? What are the structural features (constellations of interests, powerful stakeholders, etc.) behind these conflicts? Through this process, I ended up with a longer theoretical Memo, that – reworked after each new coding session – contained a complex description of frontline work and that was grounded in the data.





## 6. Results

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### 6.1. A Short Introduction to Motivational Semesters

The “semesters de motivation” are financed by the local office for labor market policy and figure under the spendings for active labor-market measures. Historically, the implementation of the “Motivational Semesters” goes back to the period of the early nineties, in which the federal government stood under pressure to provide a temporary solution for young people who could not find an apprenticeship (Heinmann 2006 Froidevaux/Weber 2003, see chapter 2.3). At first, implemented as an experimental measure during the 1990s, the legal framework for the “Motivational Semester”, was implemented during the revision of the unemployment law revision in the Year 1996, while the explicit name of the measure only figures in the legal texts since the 2003 revision. It is important to note that the implementation of the SeMo’s happened in a time when Switzerland “discovered” activation and in which many structural, administrative and legal reforms have been implemented. (see chapter 2.3.) Since their first implementation, the number of Motivational Semester has augmented from 3 to nearly 80 on an overall swiss-level, constituting thus a central “transition measure”. Despite the relative autonomy of the cantonal authorities to define the quantity and quality of active labor-market policies and despite the heterogeneous implementation amongst cantons, we can assume that the governance relations are similar around Switzerland. Conceptually, (and despite the high variability of different funding constellations and organisations), the SeMo’s can be described as a mix between “work-training” in the first labor-market or in workshops located in the institutions, a rather minor part of schooling (maximum two days a week), assistance in writing applications and an intensive personalized and individualized “follow-up” through regular counseling. The SeMo aims at a “profound assessment” of the situation of each participant in order to establish a professional “insertion strategy” that has to be followed by the participant and which is controlled in weekly follow-up counseling sessions with a personal counselor. The participants of the Motivation Semesters are subject to the legal requirements of reciprocity as fixed in the unemployment insurance law (LACI § 97b). they thus officially must comply with the obligation of writing a certain num-

ber of applications per month, while other legal regulations of the unemployment insurance for adult beneficiaries do not apply to the same degree. The SeMo's are funded through "subvention contracts" with the local PES, according to which they are paid for a specific number of participant-places. Throughout the year, the occupancy rate has to amount to 92 % in order to maintain the same amount of funding. In addition, the providers of the Motivational Semester, mostly not-for-profit organizations and third sector associations have to fulfil minimal requirements in order to benefit from the subventions. These minimum requirements include, among others, the strict application of the regulations as they figure in the Swiss unemployment insurance law (This includes, for example, the prescribed number of applications to be written by the participants per month as well as the application of relatively strict sanctioning regime).

The governance relations of the Motivational Semester can be described within a complex "triangle" between the service provider (usually a private/ third sector organization), the service purchaser (the cantonal office for logistics of active labor-market policies, directly attached to cantonal employment office) and the beneficiary, who is subject to the eligibility conditions, rules and administrative requirements of the unemployment insurance. This "triangle" comes with a complex arrangement of different duties, formalized and non-formalized accountability relations and power-relations. As participants become beneficiaries of the unemployment insurance when enrolling in the measure, a specific set of preconditions, requirements and behavioral imperatives applies to them. These specifications mainly refer to the "CIVIC" order of worth – they define the conditions according to which each and every worker, as an "equal citizen" (subjects of the civic OoW) can aspire to draw on collective solidarity for securing individual welfare. As such, laws emitted by the state act as an expression of a collective, civic will. The higher common principle of the "CIVIC" world are rules and regulations, that apply irrespective to the person's state of worth in other domains, for instance, their state of greatness in the MARKET OoW (income, employability) or their seniority (DOMESTIC). In the civic OoW, the citizen as a member of a collective symbolizes the state of greatness, accordingly, the individual must renounce to his immediate interests and subsume his aspirations to the collective will. This is enshrined in a document that summarizes the "conditions of participation" (Document 1) defining that participants have, in accordance with the law on unemployment insurance, to "be apt for placement" (thus able and ready to work and be entitled to unemployment-benefits) to take up work (§ 14). Public employment services are in fact allowed to command a medical assessment in cases a doubt on the ability for placement persists. Furthermore, as highlights in the same document, participants have to pursue "personal efforts in order to find an apprenticeship" (Document 1). The legislator elaborates that the insured person must do everything necessary to abrogate or avoid unemployment that one can reasonably demand from him/her (§ 17).

To reduce "damage" the insured person must immediately take up work (§ 16) Insofar the proposed job corresponds to specific criteria of "reasonable work" (§16a-i). The law on unemployment insurance gives furthermore specifications on the Motivational Semesters as an active labor market measure. These are legally open for "insured persons that search for an apprenticeship after the compulsory education insofar they do not yet dispose of a vocational degree and did not finish their school with a gymnasial degree" (§ 64 LACI). The legislator thus highlights a specific group of persons without access to a first vocational degree and deprived of other options (a gymnasial degree gives access to universities and universities of applied sciences) as a, a field of public action in which the state must intervene to some extent. The "circular letter on active labor market policies" (SECO 2009) additionally states that "participants in Motivational Semesters can be liberated from the job search activities during the measure at the profit of the search for an apprenticeship" (SECO 2009). As fixed in the contract notice (document 3.) that specifies the contractual relations between third sector organizations (provider) and the logistics office (purchaser), the tight regulations of the LACI apply to the same extent to the young participants. The only difference is that youngsters are exempted from compulsory job search activities during their first weeks (in the phase in which young participants are required perform a personal skill assessment). At the same time, youngsters are obliged to perform one internship per month (document 3). Nevertheless, as fixed in the "catalogue of sanctions" (Document 4), aiming at establishing a common framework that fix the rules of participation in the Motivational Semesters, the "refusal of a suitable job"<sup>1</sup> figures under the heading "serious misconduct" just along other sanctionable behavior ("*putting others in danger, violence, theft and racketeering*") and potentially engenders a suspension of unemployment benefits for 31 days. In fact, young persons can be sanctioned for not taking up an apprenticeship that, for whatever reason, does not correspond to their expectations. As described above, the Motivational Semesters being implemented within the framework of the unemployment insurance, their official goal is the "improvement of the aptitude to take up a job in order to enable a fast and sustainable labor-market integration" (§59 line. 2 LACI). The Motivational Semesters are implemented by third sector organizations mandated by the logistics office of the cantonal employment service. The primary and official goal can be described as increasing the employability of the beneficiaries – more specifically through bringing back the job-searchers into employment through qualification measures which lead to a "realist professional project" (Document 3). As such, third sector organizations are subcontracted by the "logistics office" of the cantonal employment service that "buys" for each year a

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1 The "catalogue of sanctions" a document that is designed for the internal use thus takes up the original phrasing of the corresponding article in unemployment insurance law, see chapter 6.2.1.

number of participants/places. Counselors of the regional public employment services attribute these measures to participants and "delegate" a part of the follow up of the job-seeker to the Motivational Semester. Nevertheless, the PES-counsellors are informed each month on the progress of the measure, the specific progress of the job seekers they follow and on specific infringements of the participant. The subcontracted third sector organizations are submitted to a wide range of regulations that are fixed in the "contract notice" (document 3), which constitutes the contractual basis for subventions and gives regulatory prescriptions on the design of the program. The relation between the logistics office of the cantonal employment service and the third sector organization is a classic "purchaser-provider" relation that is characterized – in the vocabulary of the economy of conventions – by the "MARKET" OoW: The purchaser defines the (minimal) product specificities, defines the goals and specificities of the product and the financial contribution (price) that he is willing to pay. The latter is also articulated in the quality standards which defines the clients as "the financing authority that has commissioned an integration service" (AOMAS: 2010). While this arrangement does not correspond to a true market situation, the collaborators of the logistics office highlight that the minimal requirements of the subvention contract allow for considerable creativity in the specific design of the measure. It is convenient to talk about a "controlled" market as, despite considerable freedom to design the measure, each organization must be certified by specific quality norms that are provided by an association of organizations providing labor-market integration measures. These norms act as a kind of regulatory standard defining processes and providing standardized, uniform criteria most likely correspond to the INDUSTRIAL order of Worth. Third sector organizations are thus – in the restricted frame of minimal requirements – meant to create innovative programs while acting within a tightly regulated competition for creative programs. As the logistic office orders each year a limited number of places per year with each of the six third sector organizations providing Motivational Semesters on the territory of the canton of Vaud, one can suppose that it will adapt the number of commissioned places based on the preferences of those PES-counsellors that attribute these measures to participants. As the inflow of participants is only regulated by the PES-counsellors, Motivational Semesters are dependent on them for "filling" their measure. The "official" goals of the Motivational Semester, as seen by the logistic office consists in *"prompting the participants to enter an apprenticeship through carrying out an individual assessment of their personal, family and professional/school situation"*, *"determining a professional project that accounts for their personal interests"* and through *"verifying the adequacy between this project and their effective competencies through a confrontation to the realities of the world of work"* (document 3). The latter is to be performed by the *"personal counselor of the young person"* (document 3) who has the task of organizing the individual follow-up of the young person through an individual career portfolio that regroups all

kinds of activities, assessments, and documentation. These individual encounters between personal counselors and participants are supposed to make up for ten percent of the time passed at the program, thus four hours per week. There is thus a considerable amount of time devoted to individual one-on-one encounters and individualized counseling.

When looking closer at the different documents one can identify potentially contradictory and conflictual goals that derive from the complex institutional environment. For instance, a contradictory combination of “client-centeredness” and “compulsion” (Lindsay/Mailand 2005: 195), that results from the focus on professionalized individual counseling on the one side and the strict activation regime of the unemployment insurance. Furthermore, SeMo's are supposed to perform an ongoing monitoring of the “work-readiness” of participants, and of their “employability” according to the “MARKET” OoW, which implies a whole battery of assessment tools and a direct contact with the world of work (through a simulated working environment in internal workshops and through internships in firms). In addition, Motivational Semesters perform a delegated monitoring function for the Public Employment Service and the supervision of the behavioral requirements of the unemployment insurance (“CIVIC” order of worth). The monitoring of the deservingness for aid, for instance, the regular and timely attendance of the participant, but also the imposition of sanctions in case of non-compliance. This task calls for a bureaucratic “people processing” technologies in which participants are evaluated regarding standardized, person-independent monitoring tools. The construction of a “personal integration project” (document 3) that considers the “personal, familial and professional situation” (*ibid.*), and that accounts for the “personal preferences” of youngsters in turn, implies a personalized, individual approach a “people changing technology”, in which the interpersonal relations between the counselor and the client are key.

Just by looking at these few “static” structural features, one can establish that Motivational Semesters operate within a situation of institutional pluralism: the SeMo is “subject to multiple regulatory regimes (and) embedded within multiple normative orders” (Kraatz/Block: 2008: 243). It operates in an institutional field that is made up of a variety of different professional, administrative interest groups, legal definitions of need, merit and mandate, other organizations in their field and relevant stakeholders. As shown in chapter 4, neo-institutionalist approaches focus on how potentially contradictory legitimation needs that result from the organisational environment are tamed by changes in the formal organizational structure. As the process of bringing young people into work is hardly technologiseable, it is delegated to professionals. In chapter 4.1.5 I have proposed to utilize the concept of “institutional logics” (Thornton/Ocasio 2008, 2012) to adequately describe the pluralist make-up of organizations. In this perspective, the SeMo as an organization in the field of employment promotion is shaped by competing for institutional logics

of the market, the logic of the democratic state, and a professional logic of individualized care. SeMo's both operate on a Market (qua their exchange relations with the apprenticeship-market) and in the sphere of the "democratic state" (as a public policy, they operate according to a logic of welfare citizenship where bureaucratic eligibility rules and the imperative of equal treatment before the law become ubiquitous). According to the institutional logics perspective, these logics can exist side by side and provoke potentially conflicting, countervailing or stabilizing tensions. As described in chapter 4.1.5 the concept of institutional logics remains on the level of supra-organizational logics. To provide the conceptual tools that allow analyzing how actors manage the rivalry of coexisting and competing for institutional logics in their day-to-day work activities I proposed in – chapter 4.1.6 – to utilize the descriptive vocabulary of the sociology of conventions.

In contrast to the rather static perspective of neo-institutionalism (focusing on the homogeneity of institutional fields and adaptation of formal organisational structure), and the focus on meso-level institutional logics of the institutional logic perspective, the sociology of conventions "emphasizes a notion of coordination being more open to uncertainty and the dynamics of coordination and accounting for the plurality of modes of coordination" (Thévenot 2001: 406). For Thévenot, organizations are a specific socio-material arrangement specifically designed to deal with a pluralist environment. They are "compromising devices" (Thévenot 2001: 410) for uncertain situations that result from the simultaneous existence of different nationalities within the same organization. Accordingly, the focus is shifted from formal structures and meso-level institutional logic to concrete, practical situations of uncertainty, so called "critical moments" (Boltanski 2006). This implies that in the sociology of conventions, organizations are not seen in strict correspondence to each order of worth (e.g. civic worth to the state-administration, domestic worth to the family or industrial worth to the firm), rather, "all organizations have to cope with critical tensions between different orders of worth" (Thévenot 2001: 411). These critical tensions thus also manifest themselves on the level of everyday institutional life and the concrete practice at the frontline-level. In the following chapters, I will therefore focus on the ways frontline agents operate within a complex institutional world, and how they balance different contradictory injunctions to "get along" in institutional everyday life. This includes a thorough analysis of institutional classifications and the judgment on persons. The "people processing" and "people changing" activities in human service organizations require complex, often morally infused judgments over persons. Situations of institutional classification, insofar they imply a judgment of the quality of persons and things are typical "critical situations" (Boltanski 2006). For the concrete implementation of the policy at hand, actors are required to perform ubiquitous judgments on persons, infused with insecurity and a plurality of possible interpretative schemes: "Is a person "apt for placement?" "Should a "fragile" person be sent to an intern-

ship at the risk of “burning” an employer?” “How should repeated lateness be dealt with?”. These processes of evaluation and classification that are so central for people processing activities are far from trivial. In these diverse insecure action situations, actors must actively build a conception between the resources made available through general, publicly available orders of justification and the respective situation at hand. Classification practices are indeed not simple operations of observing and naming differences. To classify means to contribute to the definition of an unclear situation, as it implies a judgment on the information that is deemed (institutionally) relevant in that specific situation. As such, the practice of classifying is itself a contribution to compromising and coordinating a complex situation characterized by a plurality of different rationalities.

### 6.1.1. Motivational Semesters as Complex Devices of Coordination

The Motivational Semesters constitute a complex conventional arrangement. This first empirical part describes the conventional arrangement of one Motivational Semester, analyses the resulting conflicts and shows how professionals and their clients manage to overcome controversies and find a fragile balance between the different forms of judgment and evaluation. This first part uses the OoW framework to reveal “the different competing or conflicting rationalities in organizations” (Jagd 2011: 355) of one organization and to describe how they manifest themselves within both formal structure and everyday activities of actors. These different competing rationalities are as described above, also carried through different actor constellations within the institutional environment of the organizations. As such,

“When one pays attention to the moment where a policy is put into practice, it becomes evident that, beyond the application of a rule, there is a confrontation between different forms of judgment expressed by the different actors implicated in the policy” (Thévenot/Boltanski 2001: 216)

Albeit these actor constellations refer to a clear material environment, the interest of this chapter is to show how these constellations affect the concrete justification work of the organization and how these different conflicting demands clash on the frontline level. A first, very simple way to gather the different orders of worth is the recourse to the exchange relations the Motivational Semester maintains with different organizations of their environment, describe the different OoW resulting from this arrangement and to describe resulting conflicts and how the Motivational Semester works as a “compromising device” (Thévenot 2001: 401) between the different orders of worth. It is important to distinguish between the different levels, actors, social arenas and conventional requirements which lead to these conflicts. To remain true to the OoW-framework, it is important to define the objects that are made relevant within each order of work and to which actors refer to when per-



forming a test. Therefore, attention will be given to different forms and regulations that play a central role in each order of worth, as "compromising" between different OoW is an active work located at the concrete level of "situations", the second part will focus on the "art of composition" (Thévenot 2009) between different regimes. Organizational actors have to deal with different abstract, ambiguous and sometimes even contradictory policy goals that result from the complex institutional environment of the different actors implicated in that policy.

### 6.1.2. Contradictory Logics and their Practical Compromises

Tensions between different action logics can be traced back to the phase of institutionalization of the Motivational Semesters in the early nineties when first third sector organizations began to implement such services after the creation of the possibility to be funded by unemployment insurance. As the head of one of the Motivational Semesters describes, the early phase of institutionalization of the Motivational Semesters, ambiguities between the different actors involved in the policy emerged:

"It is true that in, let's say, the economic logic it is [...] young persons finish their obligatory schooling, and we will try to evaluate, for 6 months if they are "placeable" with the terms of placeability of unemployment insurance, and then, it is very simple – we will release them in the wilderness! And since the beginning, here, we made the claim that in the end, we are dealing with a specific profile of clients, these are not some random unemployed. What can we do to lead them to the world of work? Except, if we apply such an educational datum, we are suddenly in a, we are obliged to use a constellation of professionals. Our staff cannot act like the public servants of the employment service, that put a "stamp" on persons that are non-placeable, there is suddenly an undisclosed vocation, to conduct these youngsters to the world of work. And it is this "grey sphere" that I found interesting, that lead me to work here" (I. 1.: 23-41)

The interviewee clearly identifies the mandate attributed by the employment agency as people processing activity aiming at "evaluating" the market readiness of participants and refers to the notion of "placeability", a notion referring to the legal specifications in unemployment insurance. She rejects the "economic" logic and the demands of the employment service according to which the organization only fulfills a "sorting function" of participants according to their labor market viability. She denounces the potential "stigmatising" and damaging effects of the sorting logic ("putting a stamp on persons") and opposes it to a notion of "accompaniment" and personal guidance that is "educational" in character and requires "professionals" rather than "bureaucrats" (public servants of the unemployment office). The latter have, as the quote implicitly suggests, no problem with putting

a stamp on somebody and execute their legal mandate without questions. The accompaniment requires professionals, that can respond to the "*specific profile of clients*" that constitute young unemployed that just left school. These clients are opposed to "*random*" unemployed, which, – implicitly – do not require or not deserve the specific accompaniment. The characterization of young unemployed as a client group with a specific profile refers to an implicit corpus of knowledge used for client categorization and can be read as a kind of a professional "jurisdictional claim" (Abbott 1988) that also serves as a form of cultural capital to reclaim control over the workplace vis-a-vis the legislator. As young persons have a "*specific profile*" they ought not to be treated like regular unemployed, but require special, professional treatment. The logic of people processing according to employability criteria – suggesting bureaucratic processing that stands in contrast to a "people changing" logic (accompaniment) requiring a professionalized organization able to deal with the specificities of each client and the insecurity of the organizational technologies that derive from the variability of client specificities. The notion of "undisclosed vocation", is an important datum, as It refers on the one side, to a "vocation" In the sense of a "calling" to which the organization is especially drawn to and for which it is suited. The notion "undisclosed" refers to the fact that this organizational vocation is ambiguous. It cannot or should not be disclosed, it remains implicit. The importance of the claim to provide an individual and professionalized "counseling" and accompaniment to the young persons for the organizational identity of the analysed Motivational Semester is also highlighted in the further interview and suggests that there are conflicting and contradictory demands between the people processing logic of unemployment insurance and the "undisclosed vocation" of accompanying young persons to the world of work. As the head manager, who is working for the organization since its beginning, says, "We have been one of the first motivational semesters that introduced professional social workers within the system, to guide youngsters within this sphere. This was quite subversive at that time, something that was hard to apprehend by the employment service" (I.1.:54-56).

The process of formal implementation of the Motivational Semester thus seems to be a source of historical dispute between the financing institution and the implementing organization over the scope and goal of the concrete measure. These seem to revolve around the question of the appropriateness of individualized counseling and the lack of assertiveness of the providing organization to implement the "sorting function" of the Motivational Semesters and the strict compliance with regulations and application of rules. Nevertheless, the story told is a story of at least partly successful institutionalization of the logic of individualized counseling within a rather strict regime of bureaucratic processing and compulsion. The need to perform a "strict coupling" with the rules and regulations of the unemploy-

ment services, and the resulting overview of a limited purview of organizational activities seen to be a source of constant negotiation and disagreement.

"We had the employment service, relentlessly watching, perhaps justifiably, but always watching and saying, "take care, you are outside of your mission statement, this exceeds your mandate, you are doing a recreation center". And the picture they had of individual counseling was "you are knitting with the youngsters, but when do the sanctions come? When do you eject from the system? When do you start the – quotation marks – sorting center?" (1.2: 115-122).

The interviewee describes the insecurities that existed during the institutionalization phase of the motivational semester during the early nineties. The use of "pedagogical" modes of operation like counseling as a central ingredient was obviously seen as being at odds with the legal makeup of an active labor-market measure initially designed for adult job seekers. The third sector organization that institutionalized the measure found itself exposed to critiques by the funding institution – from the background of a jurisdiction that clearly defined the task of ALMP's as enhancing the employability of unemployed job-seekers and that restricted access to those clients that are "apt for placement". The implicit suspicion issued by the cantonal employment office is that the Motivational Semester would not adequately implement the relatively strict regulations in terms of sanctions and access criteria as fixed in the legal framework. In fact, as the head officer of the Motivational Semester describes, the creation of the Motivational Semester also introduced new professions into the former purely "administrative" treatment of the unemployed youngsters. Social educators, social workers, psychologists entered a field that was formerly populated by persons either affiliated to public administration or to the crafts (the staff of the workshops). In addition, the third sector organization on whose initiative the Motivational Semester was created was traditionally involved in the operation of youth welfare services and open youth work activities. The objection of the funding institution must be contextualized: After all, a new "player" in the field of ALMP's, the surfacing of new professions that would eventually bring own jurisdictional claims, an own descriptive repertoire is due to their tendency to de-couple their work from direct administrative supervision harder to control. The former would unduly orient their operations to pedagogical work rather than the enforcement of the logic of unemployment insurance, which allegedly operates according purely conditionally programmed applications of law to cases. Surely, the objections of the funding institutions are a sign of a lack of an initial lack of legitimacy of the new arrangement – and bear witness of tension between the goals of then unemployment insurance and the institutionalization of "people-changing" work within the Motivational Semesters. The intrusion of these new professions in the field of unemployment insurance is paralleled by a larger transformation of the knowledge categories with which the issue of unemployment is appre-

hended socially, and in which new “people changing technologies”, emerged. As such, “counseling”, as a main ingredient of the SeMo emerged in a historical phase in which traditional modes of the organization of the education-occupation link where put in question, and in which new social demands are institutionalized and displaced from organizational dispositives towards the subject. This process is intricately linked to the emergence of new professions referred to knowledge forms and practices from sociology and psychology that are intricately linked to leading individuals to a form of desirable self-regulation (Rose 1999). We do thus witness, with the historical emergence of the Motivational Semester, a specific form of institutionalized “treatment” of unemployment, which does not restrict to “administrative” management of the unemployed but installs new forms of governing (young) unemployed. Nevertheless, the initial reluctance of the funding institution bears witness of an arrangement still to consolidate, to conceal. The suspicion that the “pedagogical” treatment of the unemployed would undermine the strict regulatory goals of a “sorting center” in which persons are processed according to criteria of employability can be counted as one of the central foundational tensions of the Motivational Semesters that still structures the everyday work in the SeMo. As the head officer describes, this conflict strongly structures the relation of the organization to its environment, and as such the organizational justification work that is required to maintain such a precarious arrangement:

“Over all those years, that was a very specific task of my position. On the one side, I supervise and coached welfare professionals´ that focus on building relationships and focus on individual counseling, and on the other side I perpetually I had to prove that we are still following our mandate and that It is more efficient and also has a higher quality to accompany the youngsters, to take into account his resources, his relationships with his family, the social constellation” (I1: 240-254).

We see that the Motivational Semesters actively endorsed and promoted the “individualized” treatment” of unemployment. It is a central institutional entrepreneur for the promotion of a view on unemployment that does not restrict its mandate to the administrative treatment, but that comes with a specific form of communication (“building relationships”, take into account his resources, his relationships”) that are extremely unselective, (everything can be thematized) and that is potentially characterized by a deprivatization of the subject, in which private troubles become public issues. It is clear that such a perspective is at odds with the more selective administrative treatment in which the person is only addressed with reference to abstract legal regulations and categories. Nevertheless, as the quote suggests, the Motivational Semesters seem to perform a “hybridization” of the administrative” and the “person-centred” rationality at least insofar the position of the head officer describes her task of bridging the legitimation requests from the organizational environment on the one side and her task to “coach” and “supervise” the

internal activities. These contradictory logics that result from the organizational environment of the Motivational Semester are not "resolved" in a specific compromise that remains stable all-over organizational areas, whose potential for conflict would be resolved in some kind of "ritualized" compliance with the external norms but remains active within the everyday activities of workers and professionals of the Motivational Semesters. As such, the professionals working with participants on an everyday basis are aware of the tensions that result from the different stakeholders involved in the policy and are aware of the contradictory demands that result from them.

"We cannot just take them as a number and tell them, do this, do that. That's not possible, we must be able to work with the participant based upon what he has, what he likes or does not like. Because finding him an apprenticeship that he doesn't attend anymore after two weeks, that doesn't make sense. Ok, It is true that our mandate is... yes to "forget" the young person, but that's simply not possible. Because we wouldn't be able to do good work, we wouldn't be able to maintain a good image in front of the employers, and the young persons, the same, we could find an interim solution, but for two months and then it fails..." (l.3.: 398-408).

This counselor talking about his everyday work with young program participants rejects the one-size-fits-all logic of unemployment insurance. A key issue in this quote was how participants are to be evaluated and what information counts as relevant to the everyday interaction of the Motivational Semesters. If counselors would follow the mandate of the unemployment insurance, so the argument goes, they would have to treat young participants as "numbers". In fact, the people processing logic of the unemployment Insurance is evaluating the young person in the "CIVIC" regime – did the young person, as an "abstract citizen" with specific rights and responsibilities, respond to his legal duties? The application of the CIVIC OoW thus comes with a specific "cognitive format" (Nachi 2008, Diaz-Bone 2009) and specific objects (forms to be forwarded to the unemployment agency, a sheet in which the number of applications must be documented), that defines how the situation is to be treated. The evaluation of conformity with the unemployment insurance laws, the assessment of the number of postulations and internships, do in effect result in *"treating young unemployment as a number"*. As the counselor puts it, this format has limitations (*"simply not possible"*), as this would result in prescribing specific actions and tasks, without considering *"what the young person likes or does not like"*. The hesitation to not prescribe specific lines of action to clients seem to result from a "respect" of individual volition and preferences of the client, which – if we follow the interviewees line of thinking – cannot be discarded easily. Nevertheless, the interviewee does not legitimize the rejection of such a direct paternalist stance by referring to the value of individual autonomy or a professional code of ethics

that would forbid to simply discount the client values, but he refers to a notion of good and "effective" work. As such, the interviewee differentiates between the goal orientation of "fast" integration into the labor market, and a "sustainable", "durable" integration into the labor market, that does not "fail" after two months. To reach the latter, so the interviewee suggests, it seems necessary to "*work with the beneficiary*" and to consider his desires.

In addition, this quote introduces another key stakeholder in the institutional environment of the Motivational Semester: The "employers", towards which a "good image" must be maintained. Motivational Semesters are dependent on firms that offer apprenticeships to accommodate their population outflow, and an important part of their activities consists of placing young persons into internships with different firms and matching them with potential employers. As such in the eyes of the interviewee, it is highly important to "*maintain a good image*" in front of employers. It is seen as an important task not to "*burn*" an employer through "*selling*" them a young person that finally drops out. In order to maintain stable exchange relations with employers, frontline workers have to carefully pre-select young people they are sending to internships, test the "*stability*" of his motivations and his ability to comply with the "*codes*" of the world of work. This requires as stated in the quote below, to go beyond the mission of strictly working on "employability" issues of the mandate, a people changing technology in which an individual's motivation, his identity, and his personal characteristics are worked on.

"... there we are a little bit outside of our framework. Because our mission, our mandate is really to work on the professional (to work on employability) But we are aware that somewhere, we are always a little bit in between of the two, because we are aware that if we don't work on personal issues, (sighing) we can integrate a young person into a job, we can call the employer and say "You really have to take him, he is really good", but he will hang onto it for three weeks, and then it will blow up. That is not really a good option" (I. 6.:556-560).

The counselors of the Motivational Semesters thus have to deal with a whole range of different conflicting demands that can be described as a complex conventional framework. On the one side, the administrative logic of the unemployment insurance law, which is based on a "civic" OoW, in which the youngster is assessed according to the eligibility criteria and the criteria's of work readiness that result from their duties in the sphere of a contractual citizenship: as a beneficiary of the unemployment insurance, specific requirements have to be met, independently of the individual situation of the person. The logic of the unemployment insurance is characterized by the idea that youngsters can comply with the work requirements and specific behavioral imperatives and that participants can calculate the cost and benefits of non-compliance with the rules (for the SeMo: being at time, performing several job search activities per month, performing one internship per

month). As such, the task of welfare professionals is to enforce regulations and standards and refer to the legal officers (the public employment service) in case of infringement. This logic, for which an administrative people-processing logic would be appropriate, conflicts with both the (professional) organizational identities of the staff and other conventional requirements that are carried through another stakeholder in the institutional environment of the Motivational Semester: the employers. As Motivational Semesters maintain important exchange relations with employers, the simple monitoring of job-search activities and the "fast" placement of youngsters is not an option, as the Motivational Semesters are required to maintain a "good Image" in front of employers. As such, Motivational Semesters do pre-screen and pre-select the youngsters that are deemed to be "ready" for placement according to the classification patterns of employers. This finds entrance into the formal structure of the SeMo through standardized competency tests (INDUSTRIAL), a profound assessment of the behavior in workshops, specific assessment forms employers must fill out after a participant has performed an internship (INDUSTRIAL), the behavioral "codes" of the world of work (wearing the adequate clothes, being kind and submissive, but not too much, etc.) (DOMESTIC), but also the adequacy of the aspired apprenticeship with the participants school grade (MARKET). The Motivational Semester has the role of a market intermediary (see chapter 6.3), which screens participants and performs matching with the job placements for firms. We will see in the next section that the "categorization" of participants fully fits within these categories. Contradictorily, these tensions result in the need to perform people changing activities – counselors must consider the "individuality" of the participants and "what they like" to maintain a "credibility" towards employers.

One could say that due to the heterogeneity of the participants, this results in a kind of translation of specific behavioral requirements into interaction requirements and the transmission of specific dispositional patterns that are required to enter the world of work. On the one side, the CIVIC logic of the unemployment law presupposes autonomous persons, that can calculate cost and benefits of non-compliance and that, in general, do not dispose of any vulnerabilities or attachments that impede them from complying to strict behavioral requirements. As we will see this is not true for many young participants. These tensions are also reported in the following quote.

"For instance, young persons are supposed to do one internship per month. That is what the employment agency is asking from us. And in reality, that is not possible. Because firstly, we will have to put in place a "professional project" and this can already take one to two months, depending on the person. Then there are time periods, like July, August or January, where it is simply impossible to land an internship because firms are on holiday. And then, with some youngsters, it is not

possible instantly, they need more time because they are not yet ready. And we are aware that we are not on target, at this level, but sometimes, we are not forcing young people who are refusing to enter an apprenticeship, we are not going to force them to do one internship per month. We know – we are outside the framework, and we do not have the right to tell the employment agency” (I1.: 624-641).

This interviewee highlights that the requirements from the employment agency are restricted to “purely professional” questions and describes the tensions that arise from the rather strict legal requirements (make one internship per month), seasonal fluctuations in the economy, and the “non-readiness” of some of the young persons. The latter result on the one side, from the fact to construct a “professional integration project” with the young person, and on the other side, the nonspecified fact that young persons are not yet “ready”. The counselor describes that it is a common policy in the organization to subjugate the strict demands attached to the Unemployment Insurance and to exercise a kind of discretion regarding the strict implementation of legal demands and the exercise of sanctions. As the Interviewee describes, this partly happens through negotiation with the public employment service agents that are responsible for the participant, and partly on the basis of a “grey sphere/zone” (I.5.: 365) In which the administrative follow up is “decoupled” from the people changing activities. The frontline work seems to consist of a large part in a consolidation between the different logics of action and the different “orders of worth” that clash on the frontline level.

## **6.2. Conflicts Between Orders of Worth and situated Compromises in Human Service Work: The Case of Sanctions**

Motivational Semesters are – as described above – part of the active labor market policy of the Swiss cantons and as such submitted to a regime of institutional rules and prescriptions. The cantonal office for labor market measures functions as a contracting authority and links the financing of the measure to specific conditions to be met and prescribes specific accountabilities. An important dimension of these accountability claims which directly links the concrete Motivational Semester to the administrative system of swiss labor-market policy are the legal prescriptions that are made to the participants of the Motivational Semester. As most of the participants are beneficiaries of the unemployment insurance, the rules and legal requirements of the unemployment insurance apply to them and are monitored by the organizational actors of the Motivational Semester. The rules of the unemployment insurance state for instance, that the job seeker is required to “be apt for placement” (thus able, ready and entitled) to take up work (§ 14 LACI). Public employment services are in fact allowed to command a medical assessment in



cases a doubt on the ability for placement persists. Furthermore, as highlights in the same legal framework, “the insured person has to do everything necessary to abrogate or avoid unemployment that one can reasonably demand from” (§17.). To reduce “damage” the insured person must Immediately take up work (§16) Insofar it corresponds to specific criteria of “reasonable work” (art 16a-i), and the insured person can face benefit cuts if the person “does not show enough effort in searching for reasonable work” (§30). For the Motivational Semesters, these requirements are translated into a “catalog of sanctions”, which specifies these rules for the specific group of young apprenticeship seekers and for the practice of the Motivational Semesters. The catalog of sanctions is a central element of the bureaucratic rules and legal prescriptions of the Motivational Semester: Firstly, as these rules apply for all Motivational Semesters funded by the public employment service, the document that contains these rules is a central artifact that links the frontline-level work of organizational actors with the extralocal social order. As Dorothy Smith puts it, such documents link the work at the front-line level with the hierarchical organization of the organization and at the same time defines “the concepts and categories providing the terms in which what is done at that level become accountable are governed by the law and, presumably, also by the administrative rules of the department” (Smith 2005: 186). Due to its validity for all Motivational Semesters in the canton and its replicability in a whole range of different settings within the analyzed measure and beyond it is part of the “ruling relations” (Smith 2005) that govern the extra-situative conditions for action for the frontline agents. Due to the replicability of the document it is able to contribute “to the standardizing of work activities of all kinds across time and translocally” (Smith 2005: 155). Secondly, the document constitutes a vital part of the institutional script that shapes practice. As we will see below, the catalog of sanctions comes in the form of a guideline and contains concrete rules for action. Using the actor-network theory, one could say that this guideline has specific “inscriptions<sup>2</sup>” which means that the document embodies specific “patterns of use” (Akrich/Latour 1992: 259) that is inscribed by the designer of the guideline and that reflects his/her interests.

### 6.2.1. The Institutional Script of the Sanctioning Procedure

While the guideline does not determine how organizational actors implement and interpret the rules it contains, the guidelines are part of the institutional structure that gives sense to and legitimize specific practices or actions of frontline


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2 The term “inscription” has been coined by actor-network theory and can serve as a sensitizing concept to analyse how different actors achieve to make figure their interests into material artefacts, for instance, a institutional document or form. According to Callon „an inscription is the result of one’s interest in material form” (Callon 1991: 143).

agents. The “catalog of sanctions” as a procedure manual is an institutional script that “streamlines, organizes includes and excludes information by instructing staff [...] to attend to certain themes and categories of information” (Berrick et al.: 2018: 41). The concept of institutional script focusses both the encoding of the script in institutional principles as well as its concrete organizational enactment. Institutional scripts constitute “observable, recurrent activities and patterns of interaction characteristic of a particular setting” (Barley/Tolbert 1997: 98). Hasenfeld argues that these scripts highlight both “how organizations select and establish rules that guide their work and how these rules become enacted in everyday activities” (Hasenfeld 2010 in Berrick, 2018: 44).

The form “table of faults and sanctions” employed in all Motivational Semesters in Western Switzerland describes the disciplinary measures the frontline workers are deemed to implement in case young participants do not comply with the conditions of participation in the SeMo. The form distinguishes between “light,” middle” and “heavy” faults, each coupled to different penalties. As a “light” fault, for instance, figures a late arrival, a work task that has not been realized within the demanded time, or the non-respect of a directive. In case these faults are committed, the Motivational Semester is bound to inform the local employment agency, and these faults can subsequently lead to a suspension of benefits. In case of repeated faults, an examination of the “aptitude for placement” (job readiness) is mandatory, which can lead to the administrative exclusion of a youngster from the scheme. The documents’ most remarkable feature is that it provides a measurement standard, that makes situated doings and sayings authoritatively identifiable and “institutionally actionable” (Smith 2005: 186). It renders recognizable a whole range of doings and sayings through translating them into “the generalized forms in which they become recognizable and accountable across the local settings of institutional work” (ibid.). In doing so, it establishes a principle of equivalence for judging different sometimes incommensurable situations, makes invisible specific information and potentially invalidates and overrides individual experience (for instance, the subjective reasons for action that lie behind a specific behavior). The form does, as an example, not differentiate explicitly between situations of “coming late” due to a bus accident or due to oversleeping. When a situation is treated within the categories of the form, complexity is reduced, and a situation is made a manageable case. Imagine for instance the light fault “non-respect of an instruction”: No information about the subjective meaningfulness of the instruction, the interaction history of the participants, the concrete tasks involved leading to the “non-respect of an instruction”, etc. are given in this classificatory term. In the procedure of classifying the concrete situation according to the organizational logic of “non-respect of an instruction”, “peoples experience (is subordinated) to the institutional. In that transformation, “local actualities become institutionally actionable” (Smith 2005: 187). Hence the frames, concepts, and categories (and the technologies) that

Figure 2: Table of faults and sanctions

<b>Table des fautes et sanctions</b> Semestre de motivation	
<b>Avertissement préalable</b>	
<p>❖ Les fautes indiquées ci après sont à apprécier dans leur contexte et leur nature. D'éventuelles circonstances atténuantes doivent pouvoir être prises en considération.</p> <p>La catégorisation des fautes indiquée ci-dessous doit donc être "interprétée" en fonction de ces éléments d'appréciation qui seront consignés par écrit pour toute référence ultérieure.</p> <p>Ainsi, une absence injustifiée pourrait constituer une faute légère, selon les circonstances, alors qu'une déprédation ayant causé des dommages importants pourrait constituer une faute grave.</p> <p>❖ Les responsables des SeMo et référents sont responsables d'établir la gravité des faits et la progression entre les niveaux en tenant compte de la dimension pédagogique de toute sanction (appréciation via "Respect conditions de participation")</p>	
<b>FAUTES LEGERES</b>	
FAUTES	CONSEQUENCES (selon appréciation ● ● ●, cf. "Respect conditions participation")
Arrivée tardive Tâche non réalisée dans délai imparti, travail non fait ou oubli document/matériel Opposition ou non respect d'une consigne, refus d'une activité	1 <sup>re</sup> ● = <b>Avertissement oral</b> , par le RSM, consignée dans dossier (pas d'info aux parents ni ORP) 2 <sup>ème</sup> ● = <b>Avertissement écrit</b> (copie parents et ORP) 3 <sup>ème</sup> ● = <b>Renvol 1-3 jours</b> + rapport (copie parents et ORP) + fax répondant juridique ( <u>suspension 5 indemnités de chômage</u> ) + travail à domicile
<b>FAUTES MOYENNES</b>	
FAUTES	CONSEQUENCES (selon appréciation ● ● ●, cf. "Respect conditions participation")
Absence injustifiée Déprédation du matériel, insultes, menaces Echec d'un stage par faute du participant	<div style="text-align: center;">  <i>Remboursement des dommages exigés !</i> </div> 1 <sup>re</sup> ● = <b>Renvol 1-3 jours</b> + rapport (copie parents et ORP) + fax répondant juridique ( <u>suspension 5 indemnités de chômage</u> ) + travail à domicile
<b>FAUTES GRAVES</b>	
FAUTES	CONSEQUENCES (selon appréciation ● ● ●, cf. "Respect conditions participation")
Refus d'un emploi convenable Mise en danger de soi ou d'autrui Violence, vol, trafic, racket Possession/usage armes drogue (alcool inclus)	1 <sup>re</sup> ● = <b>Renvol 5 jours</b> , travail à domicile, travail de "réparation" au retour + rapport (copie parents et ORP) + dénonciation pénale (constat force de police) + fax répondant juridique ( <u>suspension 31 indemnités de chômage</u> )
<b>EN CAS DE RECIDIVES (après 1<sup>er</sup> renvol et suspension IC)</b>	
FAUTES	CONSEQUENCES (selon appréciation ● ● ●, cf. "Respect conditions participation")
1 <sup>ère</sup> récidive si faute légère ou moyenne 1 <sup>ère</sup> récidive faute grave et 2 <sup>ème</sup> récidive faute légère et moyenne	= <b>Renvol 5 jours</b> , travail à domicile, travail d'intérêt publique dans SeMo + rapport (copie parents et ORP) et <u>suspension 10 indemnités de chômage</u> = <b>Renvol définitif</b> + rapport (copie parents et ORP) + fax répondant juridique → <u>examen aptitude au placement</u>

Les jours de renvol seront codés comme jours d'absences excusées dans l'attestation MMT  
 (suspension indemnités de chômage = via conseiller administratif juridique ORP exclusivement)

structure the selection and assembly of the actual as institutionally actionable are central in subordinating individual subjectivities to institutionally generated realities. (Smith 2005: 187). James C. Scott has coined the term “legibility” to designate the process of rationalizing and simplifying the subtleties of an often-complex reality that is involved in making things “legible” (Scott 1999). By legibility, Scott means efforts of the modern State to make things visible and “governable”. In order to make local behavior “legible”, it must be detached from the concrete situation in which it took place, translated within the institutionally relevant framework and made “institutionally actionable” (Smith 2005: 186). As stated in the last box of the document, repeated faults make an examination of the “aptitude for placement” (a medical assessment of the ability to work) mandatory that can lead to the administrative exclusion of a youngster from the scheme. The system of sanctions thus potentially leads to an exclusion of those who for different reasons, are not able to comply with a 40 hours working-day rhythm or come too late repeatedly. The document also contains some rules for action that are contained in each column (“consequences”). These have the character of conditional, if-then plans, and they describe the concrete actions to take when a certain “fault” is detected. For instance, for light faults, a letter to the parents and to the personal advisor at the public employment office, for “heavy faults”, a telefax to the legal respondent. Latour (1987) has used the term ‘action at a distance’ to indicate how decisions documented in one context and setting can carry implications for action in future settings. In this case, the document contains concrete instructions for future organizational activity, for instance, triggering benefit cuts. The document “catalog of sanctions” becomes – following ANT, an “active agent(s) in networks of action” (Prior, 2008: 822). Linked to the identification of potential “misconduct” are a whole network of human agents (the legal respondent, the PES-officer, the parents of the young person) and non-human agents (the form for fax, the apparatus that is used for the “aptitude to placement” test, a.s.o.). But how are these scripts enacted and implemented? What happens when they are facing a blurry and multifaceted context of action in which these rules must be practically balanced with other rationalities?

### 6.2.2. From Rules to their Implements: The Local Interpretation of Sanctioning Rules

The rules embedded within the sanction procedure document are of administrative nature, they embody accountabilities of the Motivational Semester towards the funding institution and they point towards bureaucratic procedures in the Weberian sense, insofar they are deemed to be implemented independently of the person and on a one-size-fits-all basis. Nevertheless, the situated application of rules requires an interpretative effort by the frontline agents. Rule implementation requires rule interpretation, simply because rules necessarily leave a margin of inter-

pretation. This is even the case for the strict conditionally programmed (Luhmann 2012: 317) “if-then” programs as the one depicted in the “catalog of sanctions”. The use of a rule requires that the interaction partners agree on the contextual framework of the rule (the “if”-component), that is the definition of the situation requires a specification if the situation at hand is one in which the rule applies. While rules (and the artifacts that “carry” these rules) may naturally have an impact on how situations are interpreted, they do not predetermine locally situated behavior. Their implementation is dependent on local interpretation. This has most prominently been described in Anselm Strauss concept of “negotiated order” according to which “no organizational relationships without accompanying negotiation” (Strauss 1978: 5ff). An organization does not exist independently of the actions of their members; organizational members are continually “negotiating” the pre-existing results of the process of the organization. In this process, codified organizational rules do not simply constitute a coercive structure (like in the Weberian notion of Bureaucracy), but they also constitute action resources: A nurse can use a codified rule for the treatment of patients to rebuke a co-worker, but also to display herself as particularly competent nurse in case of a justified infringement of the rules for a specific case.

The concept of the convention described in detail in chapter 4 comes with a similar conception of situated practice that highlights the role of the locally situated coordination. As shown in chapter 4, conventions are not to be simply understood as rules. Conventions are agreements on opportune behavior respectively the adequate judgment of situations that are situationally interpreted by actors with “critical capacities” (Boltanski 1999). For convention theory, different conventions can be overlapping in a single situation. Due to the existence of a “plurality of mutually incompatible modes of justification” (ibid.: 359), disagreements about either the violation of one mode of justification (for instance deviations from the administrative process of sanctioning as referencing the “civic” regime of justification) or about the mode of justification to apply at all (for instance whether an act constitutes a “faulty behavior” at all). These disagreements only become visible in the daily occurrence of disputes for criteria of justification.

Convention theory starts from the idea that institutions are genuinely incomplete. This results in the necessity of a situated interpretation by competent actors. Bearing similarities with Straus's concept of “negotiated order”, a high relevance is put on the performative activities of the actors and their symbolically mediated construction of social order. Other than the concept of negotiated order, the sociology of conventions highlights that coordination is not restricted to the level of minimalist coordination between agents. The common basis for coordination, the so-called conventions are “enshrined in books, institutions, legal provisions and representatives, and [...] are constantly recapitulated, transmitted and reactivated in disputes about legitimacy and in the construction of justified agreements”

(Dodier 1995: 153). In situations that require coordination, people “fabricate” (ibid.) mediations between this generalized repertoire of shared worlds and particular situations. But, in contrast to what we have seen in the ethnomethodological perspective, “judgments may in this context claim a validity that is not simply ad hoc, provided they respect the requirements defined by one of the models of justice” (Dodier 1995: 154). As such the sociology of conventions operates with a “methodological situationism” (Diaz-Bone 2017: 85) in which on the one side, the equipment of the situation with different objects, forms of practice and institutional rules and on the other side, the interpretative capacities of actors are analyzed. As Favreau and Lazega state

“convention refers to many more aspects of social and economic life than rules, although the latter are included in the former. Conventions are often agreements about how one should coordinate with others but grounded on interpretation as much as on calculation. But to the extent that they are rules, they do not determine behavior mechanically because they have to be interpreted and applied. They are sometimes resources, sometimes constraints, depending on the situation and on where the individual is in the structure. This is why actors have to have an idea of the social collective associated with the correct functioning of these rules, in which they want to coordinate with others” (Favreau/Lazega 2002: 23).

For the sociology of conventions, institutional-administrative rules (for instance, guidelines as the “catalog of sanctions”, fixed organizational rules or specific templates for judgment) are part of the conventional equipment of the situation of action. These act as supports for coordination but must be activated by the actors in order to become relevant in situations. Or as Dodier puts it: “whether these rules are drafted for reasons to do with cost management or administrative or legal concerns, or to provide a scientific foundation for the activity – the existence of these rules does not tell us how they are used in concrete situations” (Dodier 1998: 56).

It comes as no surprise that despite the clear-cut conditionally programmed rules of the catalog of sanctions, frontline workers display certain creativity in the application of these rules. The pure possibility to do so results from the fact that the concrete application of sanctioning criteria happens in the sphere of client interaction – as there is no direct purview of the administrative level, the translation of rules into practice is only loosely coupled to the organizational criteria. The existence of this discretionary levy leaves space for a practice of sanctioning that is not based on a simple application of sanctioning rules, but that leaves space for a multiplicity of other modes of judgment than the administrative one. In the interviews, the agents explicitly reclaim a discretionary space in the application of sanctions and justify with reference to internal organisational requirements, with reference to information about the capacities and the social situation of the young clients (knowledge usually made invisible in the administrative rules) or by refer-

ence to professional identities and ideas about what constitutes “good professional work”. In this process, the frontline agents seem to have a quite profound explicit knowledge about the different, competing institutional logics, about what their enrolment in an organization with different, sometimes conflicting expectations from different stakeholders. The tensions between these different logics seem to be a constant concern during everyday work and require constant re-balancing during ongoing situations. The structural conflicts resulting from the incompatibility of the application of administrative categories and rules and other conventions of evaluation are to be treated on the level of frontline interaction. There is, as I will show below, a “rivalry” of coexisting and competing institutional logics in the day-to-day work activities that are engaged, rejected and sometimes transformed by the welfare professionals. This is illustrated by the following quote:

“I have the impression that the Motivational Semesters follow up youngsters that can be in difficulties and who need some time and the employment service follows up unemployed that need to correspond to a specific profile. In my opinion, we cannot say everything, always, to avoid working against the young person that we look after. Sometimes, we are also their advocate” (l.7.: 81-87).

In this quote, the interviewee clearly distinguishes between two different membership categories that he attributes to the Motivational Semesters on the one side and the unemployment service on the other. The identification of a difference between the Motivational Semester and the unemployment insurance is already a significant one, as it implies that the Motivational Semesters have a proper objective that exists beyond the “official” goals that the funding agency (the public employment service) assigns to it. As the Motivational Semesters are strongly coupled to the cantonal active-labor-market policy, it would have made perfect sense if the interviewee would have described a strict continuity between the work of the Motivational Semesters and the goals of the public employment agency. As this is not the case, this sequence of the interview points to the fact that the Motivational Semesters dispose of an informal institutional reality with its own relevancies, categorizations, and institutional scripts. The interviewee justifies the differentiation of both institutional sites with reference to specific person categories. On the one side youngsters “*that can be in difficulties and who need some time*” and on the other “*unemployed that need to correspond to a specific profile*”. The use of the word “youngsters” (the use of the word client, participant, or beneficiary would have made perfect sense, nevertheless the interviewee “chooses” the word “youngster”) categorizes the attendants of the SeMo in terms of life-phase vocabulary, the notion of “youngsters” refers to the membership of the attendees to a specific life-course category. Taken at face value, the persons at the SeMo qualify mainly through the fact that they are young, that they are eventually “in difficulties” and that they “need some time”. In this utterance, the reasons for young people being at the SeMo is displayed as one

of “maturation”: once the youngsters with problems have more time, their “difficulties” disperse. Opposed to this implicit problem description of the persons that take part in the SeMo lies the category of a person as seen by the public employment agency: “*Unemployed who have to correspond to a specific profile*” primarily refers to an administrative status (unemployed) that – as opposed to the category “youngster” – refers to a single domain of human life (the absence of gainful employment), that imperatively, without indulgence (“*need to*”) correspond to a “*specific profile*”. The membership requirements of the unemployment insurance are described as a non-negotiable requirement of fit between an unemployed person and the specific administrative profile that corresponds to that category. From the background knowledge gained through the analysis of the “table of faults and sanctions”, We know that at the very least, this specific “profile” might refer to the notion of “aptitude for placement” (job readiness). And indeed, by looking only at that document, one may gain the impression that the motivation semesters’ sole task is to monitor compliance with criteria that emerge directly from the unemployment insurance.

The interviewee does not further explicate potential problems, shortcomings or conflicts that derive from the opposition of the different person-categories of the Motivational Semester and the employment service. Nevertheless, he formulates how he is practically dealing with the existence of two different logics that have each a specific view on the persons at hand. The declaration “*we cannot say everything, at all times, to avoid working against the young person that we look after. Sometimes, we are also their advocate*” suggests strategic information management towards the employment service legitimized by a professional logic of advocacy and a practical ideology of the best interest of the client. The pre-existing rule is negotiated and compromised with a logic of professional action. Further interviews show that the frontline agents acknowledge that “*the constraints of an economic logic and the necessary social work do not marry well*” and that it conflicts with the “*motivation work*” and the “*work on behaviors, the educational work*” that is described as a taken for granted, informal mandate of the work of the counselors. One of the reasons, as just shown for frontline agents actively reclaiming deviance from the institutional rule is the incompatibility between a “people processing” logic (processing, sorting and evaluating clients according to the criteria of aptitude for placement) and a “people changing” logic (work on behaviors and motivation). Nevertheless, the idea that the practical negotiation of sanctioning rules is due to the fact that different stakeholders inside (the frontline agents) and outside (the funding agency) each come with different interests may be a bit too straightforward. Much more, it is a fully-fledged institutional contradiction that lies at the heart of the “creative” use of the sanctioning rules: Motivational Semesters are asked to enforce administrative rules and regulations according to an administrative category of “unemployment” to persons that come with specific characteristics potentially standing in conflict with these administrative standards:



“I think that if we would apply the sanctioning criteria as demanded from the employment agency, we would need to expulse half of the participants – A young person who comes here and who is not employable, there is probably some work to do so he becomes employable, that is also our mission” (I. 3.: 526-532).

This quote suggests that many of the participants of the Motivational Semester are not – at the point of entry, able to comply with the strict sanctioning criteria of the unemployment insurance. The reference to the notion of “employability” is a direct reference to the eligibility criteria of the Unemployment Insurance, to which – so the interviewee argues – over 50% of the youngsters do not correspond. The interviewee distances himself from administrative processing logic and defines that it is also the mission of the Motivational Semester to “work” on the employability of the young persons. The discretionary exercise of sanctions presents itself as highly functional for the people changing activities, and displays an “educational” logic, in which the temporary suspension of administrative rules opens the possibility to initiate an individualized treatment of the participant and to slowly transpose the demands of the world of work into the subjective relevancies of the participant. “Working” on the employability of the young person constitutes a central shift from the descriptive vocabulary of the employment insurance. “being employable” is re-signified from a characteristic of persons that people dispose of (or not) into a category that can be “worked on”, that can be treated. The problem of “non-employability” is re-classified into a pedagogical problem, into an organisationally manageable problem.

“Sure, as soon as we follow up a young person, and we start to set goals on work behavior to somebody that didn´t work for a whole year, he will need some time to synchronize first. we evidently will not sanction him for coming 4 minutes too late, or for missing out on an objective. So, this is always this “grey zone”, on which we want to have a hold on” (I.5.: 345-365.)

While the preceding quote is an indicator for the discretionary application of sanctions, it also points to a specific incompatibility between the conception of the “welfare beneficiary” of the unemployment insurance and the classification according to the internal organizational logic of the Motivational Semester. To be transformed as a subject of the organization in question, to be transformed into a “manageable case”, The requirements of the unemployment insurance must be re-signified into “employability troubles” (Orianne 2005: 175) that can be treated on the individual level. The sanctioning criteria of the unemployment insurance operate with a “juridical-legal” conception of young persons as rationally choosing economic actors, which would rationally choose welfare over work, thus having to be given the “right” incentives. Welfare policies presuppose the “autonomous” and self-sufficient individuals they are trying to restore. The very idea of sanctioning

builds on the premise that “welfare recipients who face the threat of sanctions are capable of complying with the work requirements” that “the failure to comply signifies a lack of motivation”, as well as that the beneficiaries “are aware of the rules and can rationally calculate the costs and benefits of complying” (Hasenfeld et. al. 2004: 304). For instance, the inability to develop a professional project and to do the legally prescribed number of internships and Job search-activities precludes that young persons have the necessary autonomy to do so. This has consequences for the people processing in the SeMo. Besides the obvious fallacies of the juridical-legal subject as the guiding principle of the sanctioning rules, we see that front-line agents – when it comes to describing the characteristics of the participants – amount to a whole normative register of appropriate action that accounts for what it means to be “employable”. On the one side, there are clear youth-specific, “developmental” criteria, (the *“lack of maturity” of some youngsters*, on the other side, they describe violations of specific normative forms that refer to the site of the training firm, for instance not *“knowing the codes of the word of work”*, *“problems of regularity”*, the *“lack of motivation”*. These characteristics refer to a range of specific individual traits that clearly exceed the juridical-legal subject definition of unemployment insurance. The fact that many of them *“do not know how to sell themselves In front of employers”*, have *“a totally wrong image of a specific profession”*, *“sabotage themselves due to their low self-esteem”* or *“do not even know what they want”*, refers to personal characteristics that are not enshrined in the juridical-legal conception of the subject as it is represented in the legal codes of the unemployment insurance, but that are central organizational categorizations that make unemployment a “treatable” issue (by the means at the disposition in the organization). Last but not least, the inability to perform the required number of internships because of *“non-readiness”* and the need to work on the *“individual integration project”*, or *“the image she wants to show from herself”* shows that there is a “gap” between the construction of the person in unemployment insurance and the “real” life-situation of the participants in the SeMo.

The conception of the welfare subject in the unemployment insurance presumes an instrumental-rational individual, in which both job-preferences and aspirations derive from individuality herself and who is “independently capable of action and driven by her internal motivations” (Ehrenberg 1999: 311). This is – as the manifold informal client categories show, obviously not the case. Much more, the abstract liberal political subject, – before its status as an “autonomous being” – needs to find a hold in relationships of recognition and supportive relationships in the close, familiar sphere. The “morally responsible self” that is presupposed in the liberal conception of the person is dependent on “relations of intersubjective recognition” (Anderson/Honneth 2005: 127) as a constitutive precondition for the ability to pursue own life-projects. The “capacity to act”, or a sense of “biographical agency” – so generously presumed in the notion of the “individualized integration project” is

only possible from the Background of “a view of oneself as the legitimate source of reasons for acting” (Anderson/Honneth 2005: 146). It seems as, sometimes, the policy documents presume the individual they are trying to restore. Because of this gap, counselors in the Motivational Semester seem to pursue a careful construction and reconstruction of “agentic” individuals, or of “clients that can create themselves” (Andersen 2007). The interactive transformation of a disciplinary practice of sanctioning, in which an external demand (“*the codes of the world of work*”) Is displaced into the interiority of persons (“*he has to make this injunction his own*”) requires the welfare professionals to act in a “*grey sphere*” in which the sanction criteria are temporally suspended in order to enter into an interactive negotiation of the goals that an individual could reasonably subject himself to. The “suspension” of sanction opens up a space in which the sanctions no longer involve a coercive practice but aim at fostering practices of self-formation.

### 6.2.3. The Grey Sphere of Acting “Below the Conventions”

As the following quote shows, the compromising of these different logics of action and evaluation is a continual task that must be situatively negotiated by the frontline agents. This can be described as a skillful “art of composition” (Thévenot 2009: 808) of different conventions. On the one side, the strict enforcement of the “one-size fits all”, conditional sanctioning rules would amount to an administrative treatment of persons, a treatment that would consequentially invalidate the possibility to account for the personal attachments and vulnerabilities of the singular person and restrict the possibility for a trustful work-alliance between client and professional. On the other side, a pure orientation on the “regime of proximity” would invalidate the character of the Motivational Semester as a public policy and inevitably lead to conflict with the formal requirements of the organization.

If a youngster is late all the time, I mean 20-30 minutes, we are legally obliged to sanction him, within three days, we can fire him, but that’s not our objective – we will have to account for this problem and set him goals to work with the young person so he makes this injunction his own and he realizes that these are the codes without which one cannot make it in the world of work” (l.4:694-699).

This quote shows that organizational practice often happens “below the conventions” (Breviglieri et al. 2007: 129) insofar the temporary suspension of convention-based horizons of evaluation takes place in a discretionary grey sphere implying a deliberate flouting of legal prescriptions and their formal evaluation criteria. This temporary suspension of the legal horizons of judgment enable a form “situated judgment” (Boltanski/Thévenot 2000: 208) in which the young person is not noticed as an abstract citizen in the civic order of worth, but as a concrete subject, which disposes of a restricted equipment of action resources and which – at least poten-

tially – is equipped with a volition to voluntarily comply to the abovementioned requirements. In terms of the economy of conventions this constitutes a form of situated compromise between the industrial order of worth (young persons should satisfy the criteria of the labor market, for instance regarding the expectation of being on time), the civic order of worth (receiving unemployment benefits is tied to conditions that are valid for all, independent of their personal circumstances) and a regime of familiar engagement that means, the way in which a person is engaged with the world in order to serve “the good of personal and local convenience and feeling at ease, and its personal access to reality as usual and used surroundings” (Thévenot 2008: 20).

This specific pedagogical pragmatic regime characterized through proximity, closeness, and interdependence (Thévenot 2011), aims at introducing the young person to the “tests” of the labor market in a gentle and cautious way while considering his life-world and biographic embeddings. In some situations, in which young participants came too late to the Motivational Semester, the frontline agents made dependent the application of the administrative sanctioning criteria on the capacity of the young persons to justify it and apologize for it. In the vocabulary of the sociology of conventions, the situation of “coming too late” can be described as a “critical moment” (Boltanski/Thévenot 1999), as a situation of a “test” (Dansou/Langley 2012) in which the local ongoings have to be aligned with the conventional equipment of the situation, and where a conflict between the civic order of worth (enshrined in the institutional rules of sanctioning) and the pragmatic regime of engagement unfolds<sup>3</sup>. In the everyday practices of the Motivational Semesters also justifications that refer to the proximity of the person („I overslept”) are seen as valid, especially as they allow the frontline agents to thematize private life conduct (for instance playing computer games all night long) as a public problem. This would not be

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3 The conventional equipment of the situation of sanctioning can be deciphered as follows: “*Coming to late*”, insofar it relates to the necessary “codes” of the world of work and constitutes a central evaluation criteria of employers, refers to the “INDUSTRIAL” OoW. Not being on time conflicts with the temporal organization of the daily work of a firm, with the plans and the organizational procedures and workflows. The “*legal obligation to sanction*” (*table of faults and sanctions*) refers to the cognitive format of the “CIVIC” OoW, in which the person is evaluated in terms of a “abstract citizen”, irrespective of personal characteristics. Abstracting from the particularities of a individual, the CIVIC OoW abstracts from the particularities of the person, and sees the person as an abstract holder of rights and responsibilities, that stands in a contractual relation with the state. Legal standards are to be applied regardless of personal background and individual motives. The focus of an application of juridical standards to cases is a deliberate fading out of perspectives that would suggest other standards of evaluation. The case in question (for instance the breaching of a sanctioning rule) is apprehended from a distance, it is only from the background of a standardized application of legal norms, only this stance allows to establish a legal objectivity and to avoid arbitrary decisions that would not withstand claims for equal treatment.

possible with strict enforcement of the administrative regime of sanctions. Nevertheless, this constitutes a fragile compromise, a *“montage pratique”* (Breviglieri 2003: 142), that must be negotiated over and over again: On the one side, the frontline worker does deliberately breach an administrative instruction, the practice mentioned above thus has to happen in a semi-public space, where derivations from the rule are not sanctioned. On the other side, the frontline worker is constantly at risk of getting “to close” to the young person. (Because becoming an intimate or close friend with the attended person would be a breach of “professional distance”). But he must “asymmetrically consider the required familiar accommodation to surroundings which supports the primordial ease and self-confidence of the person and usually infringes for this purpose some of the regulations or even contractual engagements” (Thévenot 2008: 19). This is what Thévenot has described as the most delicate, trying and skillful aspect of the work of social workers, as it implies “to integrate these different engagements while preventing the tyranny of one of them and the oppression on another” (Thévenot 2008: 20). This tension between two different orders of worth, between the “civic” and the “familial” requires compromise, a precarious, temporary compromise that often has to be re-negotiated and re-enacted at the frontline level. The quote in question suggests one way to temporarily appease the tension resulting from these two conflicting orders of worth: The interviewee considers the young person as a subject with diverse attachments and specific vulnerabilities, a specific, limited equipment of resources – thus as a “concrete” individual and considers the limited ability to comply to the legal obligations. He decides in favor of a temporal suspension of the conventional requirements, to act “below the conventions” (Stavo-Debaugé et.al. 2006) and to operate in the discretionary grey sphere between conventional pressures, organizational demands for accountability and the need for a situational compromise. The discretion in the application of sanctions can go quite far, as the following example shows:

“We have situations where young persons smoke a lot – accordingly, they get up in the morning and are not able to work. So, we say “ok, how are you managing your drug consumption? What are we doing with this? And how will you go into the labor market like this? Because now, you cannot”. Simply to come to such a conclusion, together with the young person, so that he becomes aware of this. Because sometimes he simply is not aware, that this is not possible. And we are not here to be moralizing or to say, “this behaviour is good, that behaviour is bad”. It is much more about fixing objectives, step by step” (l.7.: 399-410).

This quote shows that the suspension of sanctions has the function to “individualize” specific behaviors that open the possibility to “get closer” to the young people and to delicately confront them to the demands of the world of work. Unlike in the civic regime, the person’s individuality is considered in a nearly excessive manner, it is intrusively “deprivatized” (Gubrium/Hollstein 1995). The “private” sphere (spe-

cific forms of life-conduct, incompatible with the world of work) is “confessed”, it is brought to the fore and becomes a “quasi-public” issue. The fact that such issues enter in the communicative space that is established in the weekly encounters between the youngsters and their personal counselors is highly ambiguous. After all, the official “mandate” of the Motivational Semesters are purely professional issues, within this official mandate, within the “pure” relationship between a public servant and a citizen, the mentioning of such behavior would constitute a breach of communicative rules and be perceived as highly irritating. Insofar it would impact on the work behavior of young people, doing drugs would constitute a rule violation that leads to direct exclusion of the program, as mentioned in the sanctioning code. While the consumption of drugs would be a reason for the expulsion of the scheme, the abrogation of the legal framework and the deliberate non-application makes this behavior “negotiable” in face-to-face interaction. The weekly counseling sessions become a space in which the individual can express himself, without any consequences, in which moral judgment is suspended, and in which introspection and self-reflexive evaluation are accommodated for. This mode of practice parallels the Christian confession, which – according to Foucault – spreading and multiplying outside the ecclesiastical institution and extended towards a ubiquitous mode of exercise of power, constitutes a “institutional incitement to speak” (Foucault, 1978: 18, 67 f.) that puts the person in a specific relation to oneself and urges him to relate to the codes of the world of work.

“There is one young girl I follow up on, she just started one and a half months ago. During her first interview, we talked a lot about her family situation, which is quite complicated. And I felt that she was a bit reluctant to come, it was not too much her thing she has been pushed by her parents to come here and so the first week, she did not come at all. And I called her several times, we exchanged a few e-mails and then on Thursday, she tells me that she will come but she did not come. So, I call her back and tell her “It is ok, but you will have to come tomorrow, ok?” Because I felt that she would need some time, and finally she tells me that she will not come on Friday. But she managed to tell me “It is because I do not want to start in the middle of the week, and I am a bit scared to come to the SeMo can I come on Monday?” And that’s when she finally came and, from that moment on she comes here on time every morning. I was able to build a relationship, a personal link to that person that made it possible for her to come here, but officially I would absolutely have to sanction her! Because that is a week of unauthorized absence. I negotiated with her counselor from the Employment Service. It was necessary to create a basis if I would have sanctioned I would have broken all the relational work that I had done” (I.4: 821-834).

The temporary suspension of the legal sanctioning regime opens a space for “relational work” a proximal space that can accommodate the specific vulnerabilities

of the young woman. The relationship characterized by the counselor is a relationship that is diffuse, that considers the person that is non-judgmental which allows for the young person to be heard, and where her vulnerability comes to the fore extensively. The deliberative suspension of the judgement in the CIVIC order of worth (“is the behavior of the young person conforming to her duties as a citizen-worker?”) gives space for a more or less symmetrical relationship allowing for the voicing of concerns, of basic desires, intentions that are not submitted to instant evaluation and where non-fulfillment of these intentions is not judged upon. This so-called “relationship work” allows the young women to identify and formulate her wish to participate in the Motivational Semester as a promise made personally. The sensibility for the specific biographical situation of the young person made possible through the softening and flexibilization of the rather strict requirements of participation in the world of work opens space where the person can articulate her own desires within a larger system of ends and purposes. While the sanctioning criteria displayed in the official documents come as descriptively neutral and objective topics and matters, they inescapably do not merely request objective information, but information about individuals embedded in personal histories of need and care. For the frontline agent applying these criteria, putting them into practice and being confronted with the question if one should “fill in” the sanctioning form and start the sanctioning procedure for an individual participant is far from trivial. The simplicity and one-size-fits-all the bureaucratic sanctioning rules are implying a “descriptive tyranny” (Gubrium 1989), as through standardizing, they “beg the ongoingly constructive and meaningful flow of everyday life, to gloss over the way its members’ experience its objects and events” (Gubrium 1989: 212). No place is left in the description of sanctioning rules for the reluctance of the participant to come to a new, unknown environment that the motivation semester constitutes, and no reflection is made of the hesitations and doubts that the person incorporates.

This is also exemplified by the fact that despite a relatively strict conditional programming of sanctions and a relatively unambiguous definition of the mandate of the personal counsellors as “matching” persons to jobs and as the pre-selection of applicants for apprenticeships, all of them highlight the requirement that the relationship to their clients that is based on mutual trust: “*I mean if I do not manage to create a confidential relationship, I will not be able to work, or will do rather bad work, so I really like to talk about more personal and varied things*” (I.9:283-282). If a personal counselor has the impression to put the trust given by the young person at risk through a sanction, he can count on the head officer to take the role of the “*bad cop*”. As such, the personal counselor can continue to maintain a relationship characterized by trust and position himself as an intermediary and try to “individualize”, to “translate” the demands into goals that the young person eventually can make his own to prevent another sanction. He acts as a kind of “buffer” between the legal demands

and the young person: “*you understand, it is the management who decides. You surpassed the limits, you have to try harder in order that it does not happen again*” (I.2.: 557-558).

The temporary suspension of specific legal compliance constraints, especially in the case cited above, is highly functional, even required for performing the “task” of the Motivational Semesters: The interviewee highlights its role as an intermediary between the demands of the world of work, the legal demands and the young person with his specific dispositions, the peculiarities of his life-world and individual attachments. It is not the “*goal to fire him*”, to act as a simple disciplining tool for the world of work. Much more, the work is only seen as successful insofar the young person interiorizes the demands of the world of work, “*make this injunction (to be on time in the morning, S.D.) his own*”, and realize (by himself, not by compulsion) that he cannot do without. The outline provided by the interviewee reminds a kind of maieutic of subjectivity, in which the person is proposed a specific symbolic order in which his actions (for instance getting up in the morning on time) can be recognized from the background of a specific evaluative framework through which he can recognize himself in a specific way. “*Making this injunction one’s own*” as the quote goes, refers to a form of self-governance, that is not yet achieved, but that, with the help of the counselor, can be achieved through a kind of relational work, in which the person is accompanied and receives help to exert this transformation on himself. This mechanism comes close to a form of subjectivation in the Foucauldian sense and highlights both the constraining and productive effects of power: The “*world of work*” constitutes a specific system of rules and values that certainly exerts some disciplining power, but that in addition “*applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual [...], imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects*” (Foucault 1988: 781). It is a proposal to the young person to subject himself to the systems of codes and values of the world of work, which in turn equips him with a model “*for setting up and developing relationships with the self, for self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination for the decipherment of the self by oneself, for the transformations that one seeks to accomplish with oneself as an object*” (Foucault 1985: 29).

The quote exemplarily shows that the focus on legal compliance by the unemployment service hides that at the end of the line of frontline implementation, it is not only about young citizens having to comply with legal demands as beneficiaries of public policy, but it is about the negotiation of subjectivities. Instead of “*disciplining*” the young person, the counselor prefers to “*set goals*” to the young person, that he might eventually make his own and aims at fostering “*understanding*” and “*comprehension*” for the injunctions of the world of work. The normative horizon of this practice is an individual who has “*interiorized*” the demands of the world of work, who exercises control over himself, who expresses himself a willingness to comply with specific requirements of the world of work, without external pres-



sure, all by himself. As Dean puts it, the aim of this arrangement is the “promotion of desirable self-regulation” (Dean 2007), in which the subject subjugates himself under the demands of the world of work and achieves a new state of “worthiness”, in which he starts to assess all by himself, his own behavior in the light of the codes and values of the world of work. The suspension of the legal sanctioning criteria can go quite far and opens up a space of interactive negotiation of the conventional demands of the labor market that does not stop at behavioral requirements such as “coming too late”, but that can involve specific forms of life-conduct of young people and potentially involves the person as a whole.

### **6.3. Gate-keeping and the Negotiation of Employability: The Intermediary Function of Motivational Semesters**

The SeMo's are “intermediaries of the labor-market” (Eymard-Duvernay 2006). This means that they stand in between the labor-market (with its specific selection mechanisms, its patterns of standardization, its entry requirements for specific apprenticeships), the young persons, and the state, or more particularly, the funding institution in form of the cantonal employment service. From a microeconomic perspective, the Motivational Semesters work through increasing the market efficiency between supply (of the labor force) and demand-side (the labor-market). They reduce, through pre-selecting and preparing the young persons to the labor-market, the insecurity of recruitment decision of the employers. As described in chapter three, they are a kind of gate-keeper that is “in charge of to assess persons according to criteria which decide on exit and entry from status passages” (Heinz 1992: 11). As described in the previous section, gate-keeping activities are performed in relation to the institutional environment of the Motivational Semesters, they “act on behalf of their institutions and legitimize decisions by reference to organizational reality – that is, to regulations, professional standards, application queues and so on” (Heinz 1992: 11), and have to “take into consideration the interests and interpretations of different actors” (Struck 2001: 30). As such they can take the role of “quasi-neutral” third parties, that balance different interests and standards of appropriateness. The provision of internships within the SeMo analyzed in the previous section gives a good example. To maintain a “good image” in front of employers, and not to jeopardize one's “neutrality” towards the employers, counselors are keen to send only those youngsters to apprenticeships that are “employment-ready”. In their decisions (for instance, to “send” a young person to an internship in a specific sector), counselors of transition measures must both incorporate the expectations of potential employers as potential gate-keeping criteria (in order to maintain exchange relations with their organizational environment), ensure consistent application of legal standards) and consider – at least to a minimal extent

– the biographical plans and preferences of the youngsters. But gate-keeping activities also happen on a more basic level of the Motivational Semester. These different considerations that enter into the frontline agent’s gate-keeping activities can amount to pure acceptance or rejecting of participants “as members of institutionalized collectivities” (Heinz 1992: 10-11) in this case – the “world of work”.

### 6.3.1. Exclusion Through Sorting Out

What are then the membership criteria according to which young persons are pre-selected, and which lead to the “acceptance” or “rejection” as members of the institutionalized collectivity of the world of work? What are the tools, instruments, and according to which cognitive categories are youngsters are evaluated? While on the one side, the Motivational Semesters can help to overcome those gate-keeping processes that prevent especially lower educated youth to get invited for a job interview, they act as gate-keepers themselves, and to a certain extent reproduce the exclusion mechanisms of the apprenticeship-market. This is reflected in the membership criteria of the organization: Participation in the Motivational Semester is – as we have seen in the previous chapter – dependent on the criteria of “being apt for placement” (which means – having no bodily impairments or other characteristics that would impede labor-market participation). Youngsters not corresponding to these criteria would be legally a case for invalidity insurance. As we will see below, the categorization system employed by the Motivational Semester can lead to the exclusion of specific youngsters, particularly of those that are categorized as not being compatible with the demands of the unemployment insurance. The sanctioning criteria provide an institutional resource for the exclusion of specific clients.

Seen from the overall design of the Swiss transition system, the “administrative exclusion” from the scheme has different functions. Firstly, a gate-keeping function for the different, highly fragmented social insurance systems that deal with youngsters. Access to offers from the office for youth protection (providing measures for young persons under the age of 18 who have specific emotional and/or psychic impairments) requires that a young person is categorized as “non-apt for placement” before offering their services. The Motivational Semesters, through testing the work-readiness of youngsters and more importantly through administratively excluding youngsters, thus performs a sorting according to “work readiness” criteria. The latter is exemplified by the following quote, in which an interviewee describes the practice of the youth protection unit to send youngsters to the SeMo in order to “screen” their labor-market readiness:

“At some point, they were sending us youngsters that manifestly were suffering, that really had other issues than finding an apprenticeship. They came here, with

the official demand of the unemployment agency, that means, not more than one time coming to late, 2-3 minutes means a sanction – that’s very strict as a demand, and we had to molest them without them even having a professional project, so that they had the “stamp” of non-placeability, in order to be entitled to access other measures on the basis of the youth protection service...” (I. 1. 111-116.)

Secondly, through categorizing and sifting youngsters according to the behavioral requirements of the labor market, the Motivational Semesters perform a sort of screening of applicants for potential employers. In selecting applicants from the pool of participants of the Motivational Semesters, the insecurity of the suitability of participants for a specific position during recruitment decisions is reduced. This might constitute a central mechanism for the Motivational Semesters to process their client towards successful labor-market integration, but this happens at the price of exclusion of some.

“Finally, I mean, there comes a moment where... the counselor, often together with the agent from the public employment service think that a sanction makes sense. Sometimes, it is good for us, because we see that we are outside of our mandate. This means, if there is a youngster who is obviously at the wrong place, we start a count-down, and say “ok listen, we are sorry” one, two, three – ejection. We do not have that many of those, but the sanctioning criteria can come in handy, sometimes” (I.12.:1281-1230).

The sanctioning rules provide an institutional legitimation for the sifting out of specific youngsters. From the point of view of the organization, this is seen as useful, as it constitutes a potential lever for “rationing services” (Lipsky 1982: 82) and for the limitation of access and demand. In situations in which the Motivational Semesters have a high demand (which is usually after the end of a school year, when many school leavers are still looking for an apprenticeship) the existence of exclusion criteria allows the caseworkers to regulate the population inflow or to perform some sort of creaming. This stems from the specific subvention agreement the Motivational Semesters have with the employment agency. Motivational Semesters are commissioned to provide a specific number of places per year and are required to maintain a mean yearly filling rate of 92%. If a Motivational Semester falls short of reaching this threshold, the places commissioned the year after will possibly be reduced. Due to natural fluctuations in the population inflow, Motivational Semesters are thus overfilling their measure, while in other periods, they are working at an occupancy rate far below 92%. Some interviewees suggest that in such periods, sanctioning criteria are employed much more strictly:

“Sometimes, in fact regularly, we say – when we feel that there is a large group to manage – the norm is that after four faults, there is a sanction, ok. We can also

apply it quite strictly. What I mean at some point we start to say, we also regulate the population flow" (I. 1.: 127-129).

The latter quote suggests that there the discretionary application of sanctions provide at least a potential possibility of "creaming", thus focusing the organizational resources on those who are most promising in terms of labor-market integration: confronted with more clients than can readily be accommodated, the Motivational Semesters often choose those who seem most likely to succeed in terms of success criteria. The latter is enabled by the considerable discretion professional dispose of the application of sanctions as this happens under relative withdrawal of supervision by the employment service: "*we are not controlled in the very concrete operations. Nobody will look at the attendance list and ask: there have been three absences, why did not you sanction him*". This discretion also leaves ample space in reporting sanctionable behavior to the regional employment office, may it be in order to "keep" participants not corresponding by the strict eligibility criteria, or for the regulation of the population flow in periods of high attendance. Much more the specific financing mode of the Motivational Semester constitutes an incitement for using the tool of sanctions for regulating the population inflow or for eventually "keeping" participants that do not comply with the criteria of "work-readiness".

"We have a high "occupancy rate", (draws quotation marks with his fingers) in September and then in April we are nearly empty, because we place the young persons and because they find jobs. so, the more effective we are, the more we are penalized because we do not make our participant-days at the end of the year.." (I.8.:267-269).

More particularly, the recent introduction of a case-management system for youngsters (five regional transition counters that register all school leavers "without a solution" of the region – see chapter 2.4.5.) toughens the situation. Just like the legislator intended, youngsters are monitored during the running school year and those that did not find an apprenticeship are directed to different transition measures instantly. The legislator's intention to "inhibit the insidious raising of the age of transition to apprenticeship" (Nahtstelle 2010: 27) leads to the fact that the mean age of participants in the Motivational Semester has plummeted.

"since the introduction of the case-management, those that arrive here are 15 years old... before its introduction, most were 17, 18 years old, but we could even do better work with those being 20, 21. They have a different maturity level, it (the motivational semester) is simply more appropriate for this age group. The younger ones come directly from school, and a big issue is that they are not at all able to project themselves in the future. And that's a real problem, with whom we have to deal with. [...] And there we are eventually a bit more disciplinary, we

ask them a bit more... we make more use of the sanctions of the employment service because we want to give them sense and tell them "Watch out, in this system, you have not really understood everything, there are specific codes to follow". No problem, we can take care of that, but it is a pity, because they have a right to come here, and it is simply just a bit too early – if they would have come a year later, we would have been much more effective" (I2.:456-472).

The latter quote shows that structurally, the Motivational Semester serves as a "systemic buffer" between school and the labor-market, operating as a rather crude selection procedure according to labor-market criteria. Interestingly, these quotes show that "employability" or "work readiness" is merely a fixed and objective characteristic of persons, but that it is a contingent characteristic that largely depends on the local demand-supply relationship of apprenticeships. Employability, and it's functionally equivalent organizational category ("being apt for placement") constitutes a relational category: in moments of the year in which many young persons enter the Motivational Semester, the criteria of "placement readiness" are enforced very strictly, in moments where there are few participants attending a Motivational Semester, the application of these rules is handled much more flexible.

### 6.3.2. Flexibilising Job Aspirations

In their roles as intermediaries of the labor market (Eymard-Duvernay 2006), front-line workers certainly proceed to a "sorting out" of young people according to the evaluative criteria of the labor market. At the same time, they might act as "translators" of these demands for some youngsters, to facilitate a possibility to be selected by potential employers. As we have seen in the previous quote, the Motivational Semesters have a limited scope for action for doing so. The characteristics of clients that enter into focus are not random. Motivational Semesters have neither an impact on the demand side (the number of available apprenticeships) nor an impact on the selection mechanisms of employers. As pure supply-side policies, the SeMō's only have an impact on some characteristics of the young persons, primarily their job-search behavior, their self-presentation, and the individual life-conduct and job aspirations. This is well reflected in the interview transcripts analyzed so far. The frontline agents in the Motivational Semester do not restrict the "readiness" for an apprenticeship to allegedly "objective" evaluative criteria that as would suggest a purely economic understanding of the apprenticeship market. It is not only school grades that count, but it is an understanding and incorporation of the "codes" of the world of work, the existence of an "elongated" temporal horizon, the ability to project oneself in the future, etc. This requires a whole work of secondary socialization which is a central field of action of the Motivational Semester. These criteria are part of the organizational classification system of the Motiva-

tional Semester. Human service organizations need to classify individuals according to their organizational schemes to “treat” them. The individual client is transformed into a subject of that organization and it is transformed into a “manageable case”. In this process of organizational classification, an ambivalent apprenticeship market situation, or more precisely, a structural “mismatch” between demand and supply, but also age-specific characteristics (e.g. a lack of “maturity”) are signified into individualized “employability troubles” that can then be treated through people changing work. These organizational classifications do not only guide people processing, but they constitute “institutional identities” (Gubrium/Hollstein 1998) that act as discursive environments for the self-interpretation of clients. As Hasenfeld describes, “people-processing organizations employ classification-disposition systems that reflect, in part, organizational adaptations to the constraints of their exchange relations with various market units receiving the processed clients” (Hasenfeld 1972: 256). Employers are one of the central exchange units of the Motivational Semesters. As such, those personal psychological characteristics that are changed partly reflect the criteria that employers use for the legitimating their recruitment decisions. Furthermore, the Motivational Semesters have clearly limited mandate, partly reflected in the institutional make-up of the Swiss transition system. For instance, while “having a low educational degree” clearly is a characteristic that becomes relevant for recruitment process, Motivational Semesters do not dispose of a mandate to prepare youngsters for a higher school degree<sup>4</sup>. Activities related to the enhancement of school-related competencies are legally restricted to 10% of the time per week. Motivational semesters thus do neither have a grasp on the structural imbalances of the apprenticeship market and – due to their intervention being limited in time and scope – nor on those characteristics of persons relevant to the recruitment process that are harder to change. The Motivational Semesters, therefore, limit their intervention to changing those characteristics of persons that are easily treatable and that can be tackled on the level of the Person. To do so, the problems to be treated first have to be established: Barriers to the integration into work have to be resignified into classification schemes that can be processed by the organization of the SeMo and for which specific organizational technologies exist. These classification schemes furthermore “reflect and represent broader moral conceptions sanctioned by the state, by the professions and by other authoritative bodies that give rise to these organizations and legitimate their practices” (Hasenfeld 2009: 98). The “problems” described are not only functional for the people processing and people changing activities of the organization, but they have to resonate within the organizational environment of the organization.

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4 In contrast, the German BVJ (Berufsvorbereitungsjahr/preparation year for work) grants – at least principally – the possibility to obtain a school degree.

*"Inadequate job aspirations"* constitute a central client categorization applied in the SeMo. As the education-occupation link is regulated by the demand-supply relationship on the apprenticeship market, the propensity to get selected for a Job Is partly based on a "realistic" self-assessment on one's own "market worth". If employers can select from a wide range of applicants, they rather chose those from general secondary schools than those from intermediate or upper secondary schools. Apprenticeships can, in fact, have very different pre-requirements in school competencies. Furthermore, as described in chapter two, on an overall level, there seems to be a structural mismatch between the job aspirations of youngsters and available apprenticeship places: In specific apprenticeship sectors (traditionally the building sector, sales and manufacturing industries) apprenticeship places remain unoccupied, with some youngsters remaining without an apprenticeship place. It is clear that the Motivational Semester does not have a direct impact on the demand-supply relationship on the apprenticeship market. In turn, job aspirations of youngsters seem a first focal point of the people changing technologies of the Motivational Semesters:

"Some youngsters come with desires that are not, that are hardly realizable, hardly realizable mainly because of their school level. We have many of them and it is truly the first part of our work to say... let me give you an example: A young person enters the office, we ask them "what do you want to do? What motivates you in your life"? etcetera. and sometimes they say, "commercial apprenticeship" while she barely has the level of an upper secondary school degree" (l.6.: 230-236).

In this case, the inadequacy of the "desires" of the youngsters with the realities of the labor-market is depicted as a lack of knowledge of oneself, as an inadequate assessment of one's own capacities. While the Job choice itself is largely conceived as a biographical self-project that is rooted in the "inner motivations" (*"what do you want to do? What motivates you in your life?"*) of a person, the realization of this self-project requires that the job aspirations are in line with the requirements of specific apprenticeships and situation on the apprenticeship-market. The category of "inadequate Job aspirations" seems to become a particularly urgent problem in cases in which young people show a lack of flexibility in their job aspirations and where they are merely willing to adapt their "desires" to institutionally feasible pathways. As such, many of the counselors reported cases where a young person's where not willing to adapt their Job aspirations to the realities of the market.

"One of my youngsters went to middle-upper secondary school, but she did not have a final school degree – and she aimed for a commercial apprenticeship – and while upper secondary school is adequate, without a certificate it's really hard, actually, it is a sign that you do not have the required competencies. And for five months, it was like "commercial apprenticeship and nothing else". After that it

was a pharmaceutical assistant. Actually, in that profession too they do not take lower upper secondary pupils anymore because the level required in Mathematics is quite high. I do not know where she got that idea from, but again that was a project that could not work, a project that does not work well with her competencies. So, we made her do a psychometric test to show her that her level was not upper secondary school, you know with this test we can show that those that do not have a certificate they still have the same level of competencies" (1.8:736-745).

As we see in this quote, the adequacy of professional choice with the personal characteristics of the young person constitutes a central evaluative framework brought forward by the counselors. In this case, the counselor employs the criteria of not disposing of a "certificate" as a sign for not having adequate competencies or a specific apprenticeship position. In doing so, he uses the lack of a certificate as a signal for non-readiness for a specific apprenticeship. This argumentation pattern legitimizes the decision to "guide" the young person towards an alternative apprenticeship sector. In this case, the counselor of the Motivational Semester corresponds roughly to the same argumentation pattern that a potential employer would refer to. The classification pattern employed – serving as a tool for "pre-selecting" applicants – constitutes an "external assessment criteria" (Meyer/Rowan 1977: 350) that is derived from the institutional environment of the Motivational Semester. As described in the previous chapter, this results from the fact that the Motivational Semester as an institutionalized organization is particularly inclined to become sensitive to and employ external criteria of worth. As such this classification pattern does reproduce to a certain extent the mechanism of statistical discrimination that is active on the labor-market and that equates the characteristic of "being without a certificate" with "being an unproductive employee". In contrast to the anonymized process of applying for an apprenticeship where employers select on the basis of an application file, the categorization work in the Motivational Semester results in specific organizational responses that feed-back (through various channels, e.g. personal interaction, expertise, the contact with employers in internships, internship evaluation forms) the way characteristics of the person are evaluated by the employment system. As such, they individualize the requirement to flexible one's own job aspirations and confront the young person to the "realities" of the labor-market. In case in which the capacity of a youngster to successfully apply for an apprenticeship is questioned, specific technologies are applied to "make fit" their aspirations to the realities of the market. A central part of the work of the counselors consists of "flexibilising" the job aspirations of the young persons. In doing so, they restrain themselves to authoritatively prescribe what sector the young person should perform their job choice (see below). Nevertheless, the Motivational Semester disposes of whole range of tools with whom the young people obtain feed-back on the realizability of their job choice. The "people changing



work” involved in flexibilising job choices seems to play a central role in many of the interactions of the Motivational Semester. Nevertheless, the reported tenacity of young persons surprises. For them, the process of finding a profession involves dealing – based on their own aspirations, wishes for the futures and aspirations of self-realization through work – with often limited structural options. As such, the SeMo’s are dealing with a central societal conflict: the disappointed promises of social participation, of status preservation and of self-realization through work of young unemployed that are confronted with a specific way of organizing the education-occupation link that fixes life-chances at a very early age and in which young persons, especially those with lower economic background, are not always aware of the consequences of low educational credentials at the age of transition into work.

### 6.3.3. Dealing with Disappointed Expectations and the (Re-)Construction of Viable Job Aspirations

This is reflected in the main categories used by street-level bureaucrats to differentiate participants. A main distinction is drawn between “good clients” (those that simply need a hand in their application process) and “complex clients” (those that have too high standards and demands regarding their social position within a firm or regarding their job application). In assessing the “viability” of a specific job choice, a wide range of organizational technologies is used: psychometric tests, internship reports, numerous feedbacks by different institutional representants. The used arsenal of organizational technologies amounts to a constant confrontation on the realities of the world of work by different persons and through different devices and tools. This can be interpreted as organizational work at specific status passages, in which classification work does not only fulfill a function for the organisation but also becomes relevant for the self-interpretations of the young people themselves and acts at the hinge between macro and micro-processes of institutional classification. In sum, these institutionally mediated classifications “add up” to biographical self-descriptions, they are resources for *specific* self-constructions of the participants that one can refer to as “institutional careers”. These careers, as Jenkins states, “are as much the products of categorizations as of self-identification and self-determination” (Jenkins 2002: 12). The likely futures of the young persons in transition partially result from the “categorization work done by strategically placed others” (ibid.).

“We try not to crush the dreams, to really watch out – because that would be horrible... In contrast, we try to confront them with the reality to tell them... for instance we have a young person that is convinced, really convinced that she has to do aesthetician, and she has a really narrow vision, she has finished the lower

track of upper secondary education, but that's not the school level required for that profession. Then we told her... I think there are at least 5-6 people that told her the same thing, we all had the same kind of discourse. So, we asked her: "why do you not want to do something else", try "assistant-level" there the required level is perhaps a bit lower... "no, no I want directly have to deal with the patients, no I want to do the technician track. Her internship reports they were not that good either – we showed her the internship reports and we told her: we will do everything so you can find something in the profession you want but now it's already three years that you are looking for something in that profession and you have not found anything, so perhaps you should question your choice, do you not have better things to do with your life-time? Rather try to do something else beforehand so at least you will have a diploma, you take a short detour and then you might try again afterwards?... That one left the motivational semester without a solution" (I. 5.:404-413).

The last quote does not only give insight into the whole range of evaluative apparatuses that are harnessed to compel the participant to flexibilise his job aspirations, but it also gives insight into the contradictions involved in "changing aspirations". There seems to exist on the side of the counselors a certain reluctance to "crush the dreams" of youngsters, respectively, to unilaterally prescribe the choice of a profession. It seems as if the institutional norm of the choice of a profession as an "individualized self-project" and the norm of "self-realization" through work that is harnessed in many ways to "motivate the young people" (*Who are you? What motivates you in your life?*) must be respected – at least superficially, ceremonially. The counselors conceive their work as nearly unconditional support of the plans of the young people ("we will do everything, so you can find something in the profession you want...") and as such display attention to expressions of a will of the young persons. The individual self as an author of one's Biography is respected, even actively promoted. Young people are in a certain way invited to explore by themselves what "professional project" they are willing to pursue and what kind of profession and apprenticeship "fits" their proper inclinations. At least rhetorically, young persons are thus "invited" to explore themselves. It is presupposed that the client wants to make something of himself. As one counselor describes: "I am not inclined to direct them to a specific job or sector, I do not know if they like the job, I mean one has to like it still. Personally, I could not work in the construction sector in the winter and all this, I would be a complete dork, the boss would never let me do an apprenticeship and probably send me home after a day" (I.8.:918-920). For this counselor, the subjective appreciation of a job thus seems to be equally important than it's feasibility reason why a too "directive" approach is rejected. Another counselor used the wording: "I told her if I would be her, I would try somewhere else in order not to lose too much time" (I.7.:551-552). These quotes indicate that despite the inevitable "reality test" that is involved in assess-

ing a professional project, the individual wishes and wants of the young person are considered, at least considered to a certain degree, even if they are deemed “unreasonable” or “irrealistic”. In a certain sense, the norm of self-realization through work and the idea of a choice of a profession as an individual self-project is maintained as an institutional ideology even against counterfactual reality.

As described in chapter three, the life course is both an institutional program and a subjective construction (Kohli 1985). On the macro-level, this is characterized by the institutionalization of time-tables for specific transitions and the entry requirements for the access to specific societal functional subsystems. The described sorting-processes are an example of the social regulation of the life-course. But life-course transitions are not restricted to macro-structural, state-sanctioned age norms of appropriate transitions age, but also must be enacted on the micro-level, thus into life-course decisions and biographical actions of the transitioning individuals. As the next chapter will show, the Motivational Semester does not only sanction the compliance with specific transition-related age norms and behavioral expectations but operate a “pedagogical”, people-changing work leading to the entrenchment of these norms on the individual level. The age norms are so to say translocated from the organizational dispositive into the dispositions, the identities and the self-interpretations of the youngsters in transition. The latter implies the emergence the “stimulation”, or even the “injunction” (Kohli 1994: 221; Duvoux/Astier 2006) of a specific “biographic” self-understanding, meaning a relation to oneself and to the world that finds its source in an individual self and that is “temporally structured” (Kohli 2007: 221) and that suffices the actual labor-market demands. It is the latter contradiction that is treated by the institutional work of flexibilising professional aspirations while maintaining the ideology of institutionalized individualism. The work of “flexibilising aspirations” thus does not amount to a prescription of possible pathways. The people processing activities involved in flexibilising job aspirations amount to techniques of responsabilisation that amount to an injunction of biographical reflexivity by the institutional agents. The young persons are asked to produce narratives about their selves that on the one side inform the institution about the interiority of the person and that induce the person to become aware of the problems and limitations a certain job choice implies. The disclosed self is made public by the individual and evaluated by the public agent from a pre-defined horizon of meaning. This leads to specific processes of subjectivation that are described in the last section of this chapter.

#### **6.3.4. “Selling” Young Persons to Employers: A Process of Valuation and Mediation**

The Motivational Semesters institutional processing activities can only be understood within the specific organization of the “occupation-education” link of the

Swiss apprenticeship system. The SeMo's are "intermediaries of the labor-market" (Eymard-Duvernay 2006), which means that they stand in between the labor-market (with its specific selection mechanisms, its patterns of standardization, its entry requirements for specific apprenticeships), the young persons, and the state, or more particularly, the funding institution in form of the cantonal employment service. From a microeconomic perspective, the Motivational Semesters can reach their aim (the integration into a secondary education) through increasing the market efficiency between supply and demand-side. They reduce, through preparing the young persons to the labor-market, the insecurity of recruitment decisions of the employers. The state has delegated secondary education to companies and firms. Firms define themselves their need apprentices and the access requirements to a specific position. This allocation-mechanism of apprenticeships through the "free hand" of the market leads to the fact that still many young people are left without upper secondary education. The employers, who must rely on incomplete information when recruiting apprentices, use "signaling" characteristics to reduce insecurity regarding the abilities of the young persons. These include, for instance, the school grades, the visited school type. Employers use these characteristics as (imperfect) signals indicating if a young person will be a good worker and if he will be successful at the professional school.<sup>5</sup> Labor market economists have described the underlying mechanisms of labor-market exclusion: According to Thurow (1975) the access to the labor market is defined through the position of the applicant in the labor queue – which in turn is defined through (imperfect and fallible) proxies of the presumed productivity of the young persons as an employee. In short, individual characteristics – or more particularly characteristics of certain groups of young people may act as negative signals for recruitment decisions (especially youngsters coming from a lower school pathway or having low school grades). This leads to the fact that under the condition of a structural scarcity of apprenticeship places, these young people are having lower chances to find an apprenticeship as they find themselves at the end of the labor-queue. Research has shown that other "proxies" play a crucial role as well (Imdorf 2011)<sup>6</sup>, during the recruit-

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- 5 The dual apprenticeship system consists of a combination of work-place training and of school-based training. The school-based part constitutes a risk for employers as young people who fail apprenticeship examinations will have to prolong their apprenticeship by one year.
  - 6 Imdorf (2011) shows through the lens of the E.C. that the relevant Orders of Worth for the attribution of apprenticeships are not restricted to the "market" or the "industrial" order of worth. During the recruitment process, the "Greatness" of potential apprenticeship-candidates is also characterized by expectations from the „domestic“ OoW (in which the value of uprightness, reliability and character are highlighted) or the world of inspiration where the motivation and vocation of persons leads to greatness and that come into effect for recruitment decisions.

ment process, (amongst others, the age of the applicant, familial background, as well as gender and migration variables). The role of “low” educational achievement for the exclusion from the apprenticeship market can also be explained by Spence’s (1974) signaling theory. According to this theory, the fact of being a “low achiever” in school could act as an absolute exclusion criterion (Kohlrusch/Solga 2012), insofar employers, based on “statistical discrimination” (that means they impute that a group of persons independently of the individuals within that group) disposes of a low productivity and do not even consider them for a position. The young participants at the SeMo have a whole range of subjective reasons for being at the SeMo, some even using it as an institutionalized prolongment of the youth moratorium to dispose of more time for choosing a profession. Nevertheless, the biggest part of the population attending the SeMo is composed of young people who did not pass these “gate-keeping” activities of the employers. This may, in fact be due to their having some of the characteristics which act as a negative signal, leading to a statistical discrimination as described above, or to the fact that they have “inappropriate” educational aspirations regarding their capacities and competencies, leading to the fact that they have not been selected by the employers.

As will be shown below, the Motivational Semesters are able to partly overcome these selection mechanisms of the labor-market. On the one side, they can open “back doors” to employment for young people which otherwise would not have been selected by the regular recruitment mechanisms, for instance through providing internships to the young persons, or through performing a pre-screening of candidates that are considered as “placement-ready” and “stable”, for instance despite having poor school degrees. This practical work that leads to placing young people into internships and to make the “valuable” in the eyes of an employer can be described as a work of “valuation” and “mediation”. As intermediaries of the labor Market (Eymard-Duvernay/Marechal 2006), frontline workers at the SeMo contribute to defining value through different activities and foster valuation frames that can improve the labor market opportunities of young persons. These activities of intermediation and valuation are subject of this chapter.

The description of the practices of valuation requires to distinguish between the conception of (labor)-markets in classical microeconomic theory and in the economy of conventions. Microeconomic theory conceives the coordination between “buyer” (the employer) and “seller” (“the apprenticeship candidate”) as operating through a transparent price-mechanism based on fixed and immutable qualities of the candidate. In turn, in the economy of conventions, the “value” of individual characteristics on the apprenticeship market is neither fixed nor an inherent characteristic of the person but is only apprehended based on specific technologies of evaluation, criteria, conventions, and instruments. In this perspective, the “the market is not given *a priori*, but is constructed by means of “third parties” who can be more or less stable and institutionalized, and who can structure various

modes of activity or introduce mediation between general conventions of quality and more local conventions” (Bessy/Chauvin 2013: 95). Furthermore, the process of valuation of specific competencies is always inscribed into specific situations (Eymard-Duverney 2008). From the perspective of the sociology of conventions, it is thus crucial to highlight the different actors and processes involved in producing, assessing and institutionalising the relative value of an apprentice.

The role of the frontline agents as institutionalisers of value, as co-constructors of those conventions that make possible market exchange becomes particularly visible in those explicit practices in which the valuation frames of the apprenticeship market are harnessed to “sell” a young person to an employer. As a matter of fact, many of the young persons at the SeMo do not dispose of an official, recognized final school diploma, making it particularly hard for them to apply for a job with even a low chance of success. The absence of a final school diploma constitutes a deal-breaker for most employers, as uncertainty about their ability to successfully complete an apprenticeship exists. The school diploma constitutes a conventional object that reduces uncertainty in recruitment decisions and that as such is crucial in maintaining the functioning of a so-called apprenticeship market. In the following quote, we see that frontline agents in the SeMo can harness alternative modes of valuation that partly substitute a final school degree. In order to do so, the SeMo recurs to alternative valuation devices: in the case below a psychometric test that can certify the equivalence of the cognitive abilities of a young person to a statistical reference group, the expertise of a psychological consultant, that allows an interpretation of these test results by laypersons and that certifies the aptitude of a specific applicant for a specific profession, and so on. These are activated in concrete practices of valuation, in which – through considerable institutional effort and investment, the value that is required for “selling” a young person is institutionalized. This is reflected in the following interview quote:

“even without a final school certificate but a good competency assessment we can tell them that they have a sufficient level, there are many reasons why a person that could have succeeded in a regular apprenticeship did drop out. Particularly for those that did drop out the year before graduation, we try to get this piece of paper (competency-assessment), so they have something to show to the recruiter and eventually explain to him what it means. The young persons who have this competence assessment might add it to their resumé and our psychologist adds a short note that certifies that their chosen profession is realizable or not, to what school type their competencies correspond and so on. That is a basis for us to sell that person to an employer, to act as a guarantor and to eventually show that they have enough cognitive competencies or that they caught up in specific school subjects through our extra tuition courses. We try to validate their efforts in front of

an employer. Eventually, we will send them to do a “Multi-Check” and then that’s a quasi-official certification, that is recognized by employers” (I.11: 1012-1023).

This quote displays well the mediation work “between general conventions of quality and more local conventions” (Bessy/Chauvin 2013: 96) the work consists in qualifying and emphasising characteristics of persons, that are “*there*”, that have been acquired through tuition courses, internships and through the school, but that lack an adequate certification in those formats that are recognised and recognisable by employers. According to the interviewee, it is merely a re-description of existing competencies through certified classifications and nomenclatures (“*the school type to what the profile corresponds*”). The process of valuation starts from locally acquired competencies to larger, publicly recognized dispositives of valuation. The psychometric test only constitutes an intermediate step before arriving at those publicly recognized valuation frames that carry the highest degree of generalizability. The process of valuation must be conceived as a process that starts from less stable and institutionalized valuation frames. The psychologist of the Motivational Semester highlights that the used psychometric test “*is an indicative test, it is not a binary test with the result of having passed/failed but it can be useful for knowing if a person can do a multi-check or not*” (I.10:730-734). Starting from valuation practices that are limited in range and rather “local”, the frontline agents do attempt to approximate the most legitimate and recognized forms of value that exist in the labor-market. In doing so, they also account for the potential “traumatizing” effects of being confronted with a situation in which “low” value is attributed: “*As the young persons... you know, if we do the test internally, it is less traumatizing then doing a muti-check<sup>7</sup> and failing. I can give a first estimation and say, “yes, a multi-check will pass” or say “not, rather not, because there we are heading for a battered self-esteem”*” (I.10.:874-881). The specific valuation practices, as for instance those happening in a specific assessment practices thus have potentially far-reaching implications for the identity of the participants. Through the valuation practices do they not only acquire publicly recognized certificates of value, much more, they learn about and incorporate the value that is attributed to them. Through being assessed against specific recognition orders (Reh/Rabenstein 2012), they learn about what career options a profession they can rationally expect. We are, once again confronted with the gate-keeping function of the SeMo and its ability to produce those self-descriptions that are required by the scheme to function. These processes of institutional valuation have a potential impact on the careers of the youngsters, whose likely futures partly result from the categorization work done by strategically placed others. For the frontline agents,

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7 The so called “multi-check” is a fee-based competence test offered by a private organisation that screens over 40.000 pupils a year and that is - at least in some professional domains - to be enclosed in job applications.

the information gathered during the motivation semester constitutes a central asset for “selling” young persons to employers. At the same time, the young persons are well aware of the role that frontline agents play when it comes to sharing potential information with representants of the labor-market.

“So, the information we gather on the young person plays a crucial role in that process. As you know, at the beginning and the end of the SeMo, the young persons are evaluated, their personal, professional and social qualities, that includes not only the internship-report but also everything that happens in the workshops. The young person knows that this information is not going to be seen directly by the internship firm, but they also know... let’s say, the small things count – an employer that calls us and asks “please tell me about that person” and if we tell them “everything’s fine but he has a horrible character”, we can’t sell that to an employer. The young persons are aware that at some point, we will have to give information about him to an employer, or at least, we cannot lie to them. Because sometimes, they (the young persons, S.D.) want us to talk rubbish, to give a purely positive appraisal of them. We are not obliged to tell everything, but that we cannot lie, but afterward, if the young person does not change some problematic behavior we cannot help them. We will arrive at a stage where the employer knows everything, and it is his turn to make a decision” (I.9.: 857-869).

As the quote shows, the valuation practices of frontline agents at the SeMo does not stop at the more general evaluation frames of the apprenticeship market. They also refer to the relationships they maintain with concrete employers on an individual basis. During their stay at the SeMo, participants are required to perform a one-week internship per month. These internships are often a welcome occasion to contact employers personally. Every internship is evaluated by a two-page evaluation document to be filled in by the employer. This document allows transporting valuations performed in the firm to the Motivational Semester where they are “worked on” and integrated into the weekly meetings between the young person and his personal counselor. In terms of actor-network theory, the document constitutes an artifact that is able to “act at a distance” (Latour 1986) and influence the behavior of other human actors, it bridges two local sites, the site of the apprenticeship firm and the site of the SeMo. As the following quote shows, the personal counselors conceive their employer-related work as a “warrantor” for both the smooth course of the apprenticeship and the young person.

“We got these internship reports, that we send to the employers. So at least we know if things went well or not and how it worked out. Often, we work on specific things that employers evaluated negatively. Even if the employer tells us simply if there is a possibility for an apprenticeship or not, that can be a key for pushing things forward. Then, if there were some quirks and irregularities, that enables us



to call the firm and to know what happened: on the one side this gives us clues for working with the young person, but also serves to apologize in the name of the young person... in fact we are some kind of support for them as well, we re-assure them if there is a problem, we are kind of a guarantor of the young person, so if something happens, we will have to stand up for it" (l.5.: 1201-1210).

This quote shows that the "intermediating" activity of frontline agents involves "mov(ing) back and forth between different social worlds" (Bessy/Chauvin 2013: 98). Bessy and Chauvin use the word "translation" (Gallon 1986) to describe these practices of "knowledge brokering" that do not consist in a simple transfer of knowledge, but in multiple activities of moving between places, of "*intéressement*", defined as "the group of actions through which one entity [...] strives to create and stabilize the identity of the other actors that it defines through the way it defines the problem" (Gallon 1986: 185, own translation). As such, frontline agents are able to situate and re-define "*quirks and irregularities*" within specific life-situation, to describe the qualities one has seen in a young person that led to send him to the internship or to discuss if a candidate disposes of the right and sufficient set of qualities to be potentially considered as an apprenticeship candidate. As described in the first part of this chapter, this work is ambiguous and risky – on the one side, one does not want to "burn" an employer and endanger the reputation of the Motivational Semester, on the other side, the task promoting the qualities of a young person ("selling" the young person) while not disclosing too much of his potentially problematic characteristics. This is exemplified in the following quote, in which the frontline agent displays a specific care for the image that his telephone call might shed on the young person, displaying certain prudence for the potentially stigmatizing effects of a "social" institution calling to inquire if that person has been regularly attending his internship. At the same time, the frontline agent gains important information on the behavior of the young person that is potentially fed back into the weekly evaluation encounters and that allows confronting the young person on what "issues" he will have to work on henceforth.

"If there are young people where we are not that sure how it will work out, we often call the firm, often even during their internship in order to control if the young person did not miss out. Sometimes it is better to hide our intention to control the attendance of the young person in front of the employer. So, we call them, ask randomly about the attendance and then talk about other things. We do not want them to think that the young person is a social case that is closely followed up, or that he is a real problem case. That might also stigmatize a young person. But in case they have a vacancy, then we take the phone, we try to have an exchange and try to sell – in question marks – the young persons. The word "to sell" might be too strong, but we are obliged to back the young persons" (l.5.: 1201-1210).

This intermediation work is thus very ambivalent: on the one side, frontline agents surely “back” the young persons, promote them and highlight their qualities, qualities of the young person that might not have been seen by the employer if that person was brought to him through the classical market-based recruitment channels. Frontline agents can activate alternative orders of worth (Dahmen 2019) and make them count in the recruitment decisions of employers. Young persons that do not have the best school degrees and such would never have passed the “gates” of the apprenticeship-market might have alternative qualities that an employer might find attractive. In the words of the economy of conventions, frontline agents both create and modify frames of valuation – the young person might not have a good school degree, but he is “stable”, “motivated” a “team player” and “physically resilient” as his year-long commitment of playing football in a mid-league football club testifies. On the other side, frontline agents’ contact with employers is an opportunity for gathering information on a young person that is potentially valuable for the people-changing activities in the Motivational Semester. As the evaluation documents are filed in the personal portfolio of every participant, every official in the Motivational Semester disposes of detailed knowledge of how the young person fared at a certain internship and has access to an in-depth assessment of how employers evaluated the internship candidate. Through this privileged access to information, frontline agents dispose of a panoptical view of the young person and a potentially totalizing control of their work-related behavior. As we will see in the next chapter, this knowledge is regularly put to work.

#### **6.4. Constructing the Client that Can Create Himself: Technologies of Agency and the Production of a Will**

The last two major sections showed how frontline agents operate within a complex institutional world, and how they balance different contradictory injunctions in order to “get along” in institutional everyday life. Both the chapter on sanctioning and the chapter on intermediation activities have pointed towards a central figure that I want to take up in the following section. To use Hasenfeld’s famous distinction between “people changing” and “people processing” organizations, the last two sections displayed the SeMo mainly as the latter: participants are processed according to administrative sanctioning criteria and value is assigned to them based on the valuation frameworks of the labor market or that come from the fact that the SeMo’s are a public policy. Nevertheless, both sections showed that beyond pure “people processing” the described practices have potentially deep implications for the subjectivity of the participants. As we have seen above, the abrogation of the administrative sanction criteria and the practice of non-sanctioning served to opens a “pedagogical space” in which introspection and reflexive self-evaluation

is accommodated for, while the gate-keeping and intermediation activities served to define individualized “employability troubles”. People processing thus involves people changing to some degree. Regarding the demands of institutional everyday life, it is obvious that the practices of intermediation, of sanctioning or of the reconstruction of viable job aspirations does not only alter the public or administrative status of participants (e.g. as “sanctionable” or “apprenticeship-ready”). Muchmore, these operations also operate on the level of the self-understanding of a person. These institutional classifications of clients are not only organizationally salient categories that provide justifications for the actions frontline agents take, much more “clients internalize them as a reflection of their own self-identity and valuation” (Hasenfeld 2009: 73). The relevance of these processes for the organizational regulation of individual biographies has been theoretically elaborated in chapter three: human service organizations are “discursive environments for self-construction” (Gubrium/Holstein 2003: 13), they act not simply as gate-keepers for admittance to different life-course stages and participation in institutionalized collectives but also operate on the level of “biography” that is, the identities of persons over time. They are in Hahn’s famous diction “biography generators”, they provide institutional incitements to speak and as such “elicit, screen, fashion, and variously highlight personal narratives [...] and provide narrative frameworks for conveying personal experience [...] such organizations incite participants to construct the stories they need to do their work” (Gubrium/Holstein 1998: 164). Chapter three has also shown that these processes can be understood as subjectivation processes operating through “technologies of agency” (Dean 1995) in which participants are brought into a particular relationship with themselves. The following subchapter will discuss these “technologies of agency” via an analysis of different institutional practices. The first section discusses how viable job choices are co-produced through an allegedly open self-exploratory process. A second section discusses the use of contractualized integration agreements and the negotiation of their content and shows that these do not only imply a future-oriented diachronic perspective but also attempt to gain control over the synchronic everyday life-conduct. A third section (“making up viable future selves”) analyses a document (a “portfolio-tool”) that links the individual activities of the participants to the institutional reality and the activities of the participants as they progress through the Motivational Semester. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the construction of employable clients through subjectivation practices.

### 6.4.1. Constructing Viable Job Choices Through Guided Self-Exploration

As we have seen above, the Motivational Semesters face the contradictory situation: They deal with participants with specific labor-market barriers but have only limited leverage on those structural barriers. That is the reason why these barriers

are re-signified into individualized “employability troubles” that are to be treated on the level of the individual. One of the few characteristics of participants that the Motivational Semesters have a hold on and that can be changed are the professional aspirations of the young job-seekers. This is also reflected in the contract agreement between the public employment service and the provider of the Motivational Semester. One of the central official goals of the Motivational Semesters is to support the young participants in finding a “realistic and realizable” job choice that considers on the one side their “interests” and that on the other side, considers the “realities in the labor-market”. In life-course language, the Motivational Semesters are asked to link the “biographical” with the “structural”.

A central institutional “site” in which the construction of viable job choices happens are the weekly individual counseling sessions between participants and personal advisors. In these sessions, the progress of the participant is evaluated, future actions are planned, and all issues related to the participant’s future pathway are discussed. Frontline agents described the work in the weekly counselling encounters – despite the obvious institutional demand to consider the actual labor-market situation – as a process of guided self-exploration, in which they invite the young person to explore by themselves what “professional project” they are willing to pursue and what kind of profession and apprenticeship “fits” their proper inclinations. As one counselor put it, “*we re-place the young person in the middle of his project, and then ask, in a non-menacing way, look, what will your life-course look like? What do you want to do?*” (I.1: 355-357). This quote carries the idea that performing a job choice is above all something that the young person must do by himself. It is an invitation to a future-oriented self-exploration and points to the intention to foster a kind of “biographical reflexivity”, an invitation to project oneself into the future and to develop a concern for the future life-course. The fact that this quote describes ongoingings that happen within the face-to-face situation of the weekly individualized counseling sessions is central – in such a context the utterance “*what will your life-course look like?*”, does not prescribe a fixed answer but opens up a space in which the subject is demanded to behave reflexively, that puts the person into a position in which he is demanded to take a self-exploratory stance. The institutional arrangement of individualized counseling puts the service user in a position in which he is asked to analyze his past life, define certain characteristics of his personality, unfold his motivations and his interests. This instauration of a calculating, planificatory, future-oriented posture seems to be the main goal here, as the same professional argues: It is about “*just bringing everybody to where they ask this question to themselves*” (I.8.: 455). This initiation of biographical reflexivity, and the incitation to develop biographical plans amounts to a demand to project oneself into a socially structured opportunity space. As Bjorn and Jensen put it these regular individualized counseling meetings amount to a form of “dialogue-based activation” in which

“you receive a new chance to present or narrate yourself in a new manner in forms which makes you a participant in a dialogue leading to a social contract. It is a new occasion to do what we all are doing, i.e. to create and maintain identity through the reproduction and renewal of the autobiographical narrative” (Born/Jensen 2010: 328).

The encouragement to produce a self-narrative of possible future selves is not happening in a free-floating space: even though professionals highlight the fact that they “*start from dreams, from self-representations, of what they wish for themselves, and from how a job should look like on order that they are happy*”, the narrative self-imagination fostered here is very much oriented towards the production of “viable” future selves which are “*realist and realisable*” and which “*keeps the road*” (or can withstand) the evaluations of the labor market. The most striking about the was these future-oriented planning activities are portrayed is the strong normative individualism that comes with the language of choice. The choice of a profession, despite obvious demand-side barriers, is described as a “reflexive choice biography” (Beck/Beck Gernsheim 2000), as a reflexive project of self-realization. This gets even clearer when we consider this quote in which an interviewee describes the questions he regularly asks in the individual counseling sessions:

“What do you have? what are your resources? Who are you? You may be unbearable, but you are so creative! And what does that mean? What profile will you be? Artistic profile? or rather entrepreneur? Do you prefer working with others or alone? Inside? Outside? This allows us to bring everybody to the point where they are asking themselves these kinds of questions” (l.8.:451-455).

The above-cited quote can be read as a practice of adressation, in which young people are “interpellated” (Althusser 1972) as a specific subject. The performative dimension of these words places the subject as an individual “manager” of one’s life-course and biography, and the strong focus on the individuality and the own preferences of the young person aims at producing “individuality herself, independently capable of action and driven by her internal motivations” (Ehrenberg 1999: 311). The importance that is put on the fact that “*young people have to ask themselves these questions*” reveals the reluctance to directly impact, control or prescribe on the biographical plans of the young persons, and reflects the idea that young persons exercise this control on themselves and interiorize structural limits by themselves. It furthermore points to the instauration of specific relation to oneself, in which the young person rationally calculates and evaluates, based on self-observation (“what do I want?”) their labor-market options (“What can I rationally expect?”) a project of the self. The fact that there is no mention of structural factors (for instance the labor market situation) which potentially impedes the execution of a biographical plan and the high importance that is put on the idea of “self-realization” through work

shows that structural factors are faded-out in this adressation practice, conceptualizing the young person as autonomous manager of his biography. The institutional practice that is involved in constructing viable job choices is an “institutional incitement to speak” (Foucault, 1978: 67 f.), in which a narrative is manufactured in organizationally circumscribed ways. The organizational circumscription of these few utterances can be described as follows: Firstly, the adressation is based on the premise that job choices primarily matter of individual, naturalized dispositions that simply have to be discovered. In consequence, the client is brought to see himself as the author, the only source of a (legitimate) biographical description of an envisioned future. In conclusion, seen in such an individualistic fashion, he is the only person that can possibly do something about it and is accordingly responsible to do so. Secondly, he is installed as a responsible self-observer, that observes his current everyday activities, hobbies, inclinations as expressions of individual skills and competencies that are intrinsic to his personality and constitutive to whom he is as a person (“Who are you?”). He learns to describe himself as a bundle of competencies and capacities. Thirdly, he learns to evaluate himself in the light of specific social norms – in this case, a social norm of self-realization and self-optimization – and potentially interiorizes them as a privileged relation to himself.

#### **6.4.2. Negotiating the Integration Contract**

The norm of self-realization and the superficial absence of coercive elements extends to the more administrative elements of the institutional practice of the Motivational Semesters. While the guided self-exploration of possible job choices follows a logic of self-discovery, other practices imply more that young persons actively participate in the construction of their own integration trajectory. Particularly during the first few weeks at the Motivational Semester, the counselors negotiate with every young person an individualized integration contract. These integration contracts have a hybrid character: They are both a sort of administrative form as well as an institutional ritual to foster the young client’s inner dialogue through negotiating its contents. On the one side, the integration contract has administrative character – objectives are fixed in written form, there exists a blank form which contains a checkbox for the goals and fields for the signature of both partners. Furthermore, the goals are equipped with a field for the date in which the achievement of a goal has been evaluated. The integration contract document is stored in the individual file of the participant and can be used for different purposes in case of need. Integration contracts also imply an evaluative exercise: the negotiated objectives are taken up regularly in the counseling encounters where the progress towards reaching the objectives is discussed. The fact that there exists an operationalization of the objectives in terms of indicators and proofs indicates a specific concern for transparent and measurable steps. This is reflected in one

of the most common topics of integration contracts: being too late. As such one interviewee describes the way in which he negotiates the goal of not being too late anymore with a young person:

“We ask: What could you do to arrive on time? And then, we fix that goal and write it down. The aim is to arrive on time, using the means the person has by herself. We want to enable her to arrive on time, including to help her perform all those little steps like maybe setting an alarm a bit earlier or go to bed on time” (I.3: 673-676).

The goal of “*not being too late*” is not simply written down and stipulated by the institution, it is translated into an interactive demand to reflect on the smaller steps that lead somebody to be on time. These possible steps are to be formulated by the client, based on the resources and means he has at the disposition. The administrative tool “integration agreement” becomes a pedagogic tool to make express the young person’s goals and to fix – qua documentation – the means of realization and the indicators of their future evaluation. The indicators of their future evaluation are thus not imposed from the outside but emerge from a dialogue about what the young person could possibly want for himself and for his future. This situation is paradoxical in several ways: As described in the first section of this chapter, being too late is officially a sanctionable behavior and would lead if repeated to an exclusion from the Motivational Semester. In the process of negotiating the integration agreement, this administrative rule is ignored deliberately in order to do “as if” the young person would set himself these goals. The “control” is displaced from organizational dispositive and disciplinary practices into the person, who is asked to perform this control on himself. As the following quote shows, the practice of negotiating the integration agreement amounts to fostering an “inner dialogue” about what one wants to achieve by oneself:

“When it comes to the integration agreement, me, I ask them to bring some ideas, and very often the answer is: “I do not know”. We try to talk to them, and when I see that they have no clue, I ask them to think about it for the next time, and then we take more time. I will propose some things too, because, sometimes there are things I see very clearly and I want them to work on these things, so I try. If they are “taking it” – much the better – if not, them sometimes it is complicated, because some of the goals are so important that we cannot ignore them” (I.7.: 856-902).

In the attempt to make the young person “express” a goal to figure in the integration agreement and to which they “commit” themselves freely, without obvious coercion, the case-manager is operating in a balancing act between imposing specific goals and letting space for the expression of individual plans. Here, professional action oscillates constantly between “should do” and “can-do” subtly mixing the refusal to act paternalistic and to “moralise” behavior of clients, to impose what one

thinks is the best, with the maintenance of the injunction “to take oneself in one’s own hands, to get implied and to be engaged” (Cantelli/Genard 2007: 25). We see that the contractualized matrix of the integration agreement is a “powerful pedagogical motor” (Pattaroni 2007). On the one side it installs the young person as a responsible self-observer, which can work on himself insofar he “knows” what own characteristics are impeding him from entering the labor market. On the other side, this contractual agreement activates several techniques that individualize the person and oblige the person to “account” for his actions and to stand up for what he did (or did not). It addresses the person as a responsible and autonomous person. In this process, a specific relation to oneself is fostered in which the person promises, to himself and to the social worker to act in a certain way in the future. The contractual relation assigns a “grammar” of autonomy (Pattaroni 2005), as it assigns the person a “self” from which he must account for his actions and deeds.

The moment of the negotiation and discussion of this personalized integration agreement is highly interesting. On the one side it fixes the rights and duties to which the young person has to commit to under threat of sanctions, on the other side, the personal integration contract figures as a strong pedagogical tool (aiming at producing a “will” and inducing the young person to act as a responsible self-observer). The individualized integration agreement can thus be seen as a form of a “dialogue based-activation” (Born/Jensen 2010) which is constituted within a contradictory mix between compulsion and a commitment to the centrality of work with a “client-centered approach”. On the one side they are trying to “make emerge a will” and want the young person to set goals for themselves. This requires that the agreement is not something openly imposed, but that the young persons “agree” – in a certain sense with the goals figuring in it, respectively, that these goals are residing in an individual will. This negotiation of the goals figuring in the individual integration agreement aims at asking the young people to formulate goals for themselves – the quote below shows that this micropolitics of activation through contractualized individualized integration agreements is – at least in this context – less about coercive activation rather than about the promotion of a form of desirable self-regulation. The contract constructs the person as a morally self-responsible person. Institutions are here not acting in an openly coercive way, but governing through another rationality, which is based on the very core of the notion of Autonomy. Autonomy enshrines the idea of a person giving “laws” to himself (auto=self nomos=law), thus a form of responsible self-governance. The individual integration agreement exactly aims at the promotion of desirable self-regulation. As the quote above shows, much of the institutional work deals with the issue of leading the young persons to “bring in some ideas” by themselves, making the young person express a goal by themselves that, in a second step, they can subject themselves to. On a more abstract level, the organisational technology of the individualised action plan is a prime example of the of the liberal paradox



“with people being socially subjectivated by individually subjecting themselves to a governing programmatic of self-rationalization” (Lessenisch 2012: 310) or – more precisely, of “self-mobilization and self-control” (ibid.). The liberal ethos of self-control forbids a strict disciplinary prescription of goals to be figuring in the integration agreement. On the contrary, opposite to the disciplinary prescription, the individual integration agreement governs through freedom, through a technology that does not prescribe but creates the individual as a responsible self-observer who acts upon himself. The exercise of power is subtle – the individual comes to recognize himself as a specific subject through subjecting oneself to the criteria of acceptable subjectivity, through adjusting to a specific hegemonic figure of the subject. This hegemonic figure of the subject is also enshrined in the notion of the contract, which supposes autonomous and self-sufficient individuals that know their preferences and can express them freely and deliberately. In this liberal ethos of self-control, contracts are made concluded on the basis of vested interests and on the basis of informed, non-coercive mutual agreement. The use of the grammar of the contract constructs young persons as a morally self-responsible person. “Good” clients are thus clients who are equipped with a plan and an autonomous will to rationally pursue a future-oriented integration plan. The “client who can create himself and his own fate” (Andersen 2007) is the ideal-typical figure of this contractualised welfare arrangement. From this background, problematic subjectivity is attributed to those who are not able to pronounce clear professional goals, who lack motivation to confront themselves with their own potential weaknesses and who are not willing or able to self-reflect. For the client, the contractual integration agreement comes with an obligation for self-transformation:

“If the client chooses to accept the contract offer, he also accepts the obligation to transform himself. The citizens’ contract requires the client to not merely receive himself passively but to actively give himself to himself. It is a way of admonishing the subject to invoke itself” (Andersen 2007: 121).

Contracts hold people accountable – the contract requires the contract partners to give a promise, the promise to act in a certain way and to do so tomorrow and the day after. The client is as such made held accountable for his deeds and invoked as a self-responsible person. This practice of responsabilisation amounts to a performative language-mediated act: Participants asked to “express oneself” and to “bring in some ideas” are asked to designate themselves as authors of their own acts, and as such, performatively “impute” actions to themselves. For Ricoeur, the “capacity to tell”, (Ricoeur 2000: 34) to raise voice and to designate oneself as the author of one’s own acts amounts to an act of imputation as a capable subject. For Ricoeur, this act is a condition for the possibility of attributing responsibility to an individual agent: “to impute an action to someone is to attribute it to him as its actual author, to put it, so to speak, on his account and to make him responsible

for it” (Ricoeur 2000: 14). The performative “imputation” of acts presupposes that the action was an intentional act of that person, it performatively gives birth to an “authorized” subject equipped with a will and the ability to act differently.

It is exactly this dimension of “promise” that is enshrined in the quote above: young people are “invited” to raise voice and to publicly confess to goals that are thought of as residing in their own self. Once young people are committed to these goals through the contract, it becomes possible to use it as a tool to confront the young person with the promise given to themselves. If a person does not act accordingly, the contract becomes a tool that can be situatively activated for disciplining the young person. The underlying normative assumption of the young persons as self-responsible, self-governing agents, freely consenting to adhere to the contract and equipped with the possibility to deliberately withdraw from the contract if they wish so is an illusion, as the asymmetric power relationship between the young person and the social worker makes such a relationship impossible. The political ideal of the self-responsible and autonomous actor must rather be seen as a questionable political ideal than a fact, as it supposes, on the side of the young persons at the minimum a sufficient number of alternative acceptable alternatives.

### 6.4.3. Private Problems Becoming Public Issues

The integration agreements do not only contain goals relating to job search activities, behavioural issues or goals related to virtues relevant to the labour-market. In many cases, the goals negotiated and fixed in the contractualized integration agreements cover other areas of private life-conduct of the young persons. As one counsellor puts it: *“it (the contractualized integration agreement, SD) can also touch a number of other domains, for instance, health, friends, addiction problems – all those things that can inhibit them from getting up in the morning, or coming here and not being ready to work”* (I.11.:328-331). The negotiation of the contents of individual action plans thus gradually expands beyond the “public” sphere, in which the contract covers the legal obligations that citizens have to fulfil vis-a vis the state, on to the private sphere of everyday life-conduct. This “de-privatization” (Gubrium/Holstein 1995; 221) makes individual life-conduct subject to publicly situated interpretation and negotiation. While the contractual form evokes the idea of “consent, freedom of choice and the willing assumption of mutual responsibility” (Freedland/King 2003: 470), in this example, it extends to a rather disciplinary behavior-management tool in the narrow sense. The individual action plan may contain attitudinal dimensions (*being on time, respect the hierarchy, learning to control one’s impulsions, learning to communicate*) and potentially covers issues of the personal life and the social environment (*care for my self-presentation, care for my hygiene, limit my drug consumption, replace some of my frequentations (friends)*). In the framework of the contractualized integration agreement, becoming “employable” is thus not only linked to the direct labor-mar-

ket prospects but entails the whole person and reaches into the subtle dimensions of everyday life. The regulation of transitions does thus not only happen on a diachronic, biographical level (through the fostering of biographical reflexivity aiming at the development of projections of a realist and realizable possible self) but also entails at least to the same extent a “synchronic” regulation of individual life-conduct. The emphasis put on individual life-conduct makes perfect sense from a perspective that views the transition from school to work as a continual process of socialization and adaptation, in which the practices and engagements associated with being a young person where the “extended present” (Leccardi 2008: 126) is the temporal point of reference are being replaced by those required of “adult” life. Young people are embedded in a multiplicity of sometimes conflicting temporal horizons and everyday life-worlds (most prominently, the world of peers and same-age sociability and the world of work) that must be coordinated and mastered in order to develop a rationalized life-conduct which suffices the demands of capitalist economy. This includes finding a balance between the different key ecologies of youth life and their temporal orders and future options and possibilities. This ability to develop a stable balance between actual and future action-projects is not simply given and does not naturally emerge from the temporal rationalities of modern life-worlds, but it is something that is developed little by little. The mode of life-conduct the status of “working adult” implies has to be adopted slowly by the newcomers, it is not a natural component of their life-worlds. Not going out during weekdays because of school, the belief that getting a degree may be important for the future life-course is hardly conceivable without nurturing (and perhaps disciplining) parents, without considerable confident hopes for the future, and a strong assertiveness vis-a-vis the many short-lived temptations, activities and practices associated with the contemporary youth phase. The ability to perform a projection into the future is dependent on the ability – as Leccardi calls it “delayed gratification” that altogether that involves a strong capacity for self-control (see Leccardi 2008: 120). This basic socialization work, in which “young people are socially required to construct positive forms of relationships between their own time of life and social time” (ibid.: 126). earlier conducted by central societal institutions equipped with the legitimacy to entrench these values and behavioral codes, sometimes even violently, is – in the neo-social state – replaced by a model in which social intervention endorses the obligation to construct and reconstruct subjectivity as the capacity to conduct self-government.

#### **6.4.4. Modulating Distance to Accommodate for the Pitfalls of the Contract**

Despite the central role of these contractual agreements for the inner working of the Motivational Semester, their implementation in concrete practices was often not as straightforward as the last chapter may have suggested. While most frontline

agents made use of the contract-metaphor in a quite straightforward way, others highlighted that their use is tied to specific pitfalls, making them inappropriate for some youngsters. As such, several frontline agents expressed concerns regarding the very early implementation of integration contracts. In their quotes, a specific sensibility for the potentially devastating effects of the contract on the subjectivities of users makes room for modulation of the relational distance between the client and the frontline agent. Several frontline agents refer to potential vulnerabilizing effects of the contractual relationship for the capacity of young people to make plans and to project in the future. As one counsellor puts it:

“If you work via the contract, the young person commits himself in a very formal manner [...] that can bring up quite a high pressure and eventually even some anxiety, anxiety linked to not being able to reach the goals—“I signed – if I will not reach the goals, I will not have delivered. I will have broken the contract and at the same time the promise I have given. Thus I am incapable, I rather do not try anymore”. So, if we continue to put them in front of something, something too difficult to achieve, that’s too much pressure, especially at the beginning of such a process” (I.8.: 285-297)

The contractual relationship that asks the young persons to give a promise to themselves risks confronting the young persons with repeated experience of failure. The inability to fulfill the contractual obligation is experienced as failure of a person to conform to a norm of subjective self-mobilization whose potentially vulnerabilizing effects derive from the fact that it constitutes a self-set goal and not an external injunction. Autonomy, as enshrined in the contract, constitutes a symbolic and normative order that translates into imperatives of self-realization and self-responsibility. The inability to comply with self-set goals results in a failure to comply with this general social norm that is institutionally harnessed in the integration contract. The quote of the frontline agent shows a certain sensibility for the potentially deleterious effects of an iterated experience of failure and the negative effects on self-esteem deriving from it. The quote displays sensibility for the prerequisites of engaging into a contract, of giving a promise. As described above, the contractual tool implies a performative act of “imputability” (Ricoeur 2006) of designating oneself as the actor of one’s acts and has an ethical dimension as it implies a “promise” (to act tomorrow as promised today) that makes the subject accountable in front of somebody else. As Ricoeur puts it “The promise limits the unpredictability of the future – at the risk of betrayal. Subjects may keep their promises or break them. In this way, they make a pledge additional to the original promise: the pledge that they will keep their word, that they will be dependable” (Ricoeur 2006: 18). The risk of the “*broken contract, and at the same time the promise*” portrayed by the frontline agent, describes the risk of the contractualized mode of holding somebody accountable to leave the promise-giver in a situation where

he is not able to satisfy the promise not only given to the frontline agent, but also to himself. The contract is thus at risk of leaving the young person vulnerabilized, with a feeling of “incapacity”, that makes it impossible to subscribe to a plan, to try, to project oneself into the future. The ethical tragedy of the contractual agreement is that the failure of the promise implies the failure to comply with the self-set standard of autonomy, leaving the person with a feeling of inferiority (*Thus I am really incapable, I rather do not try anymore*). The strongly individualizing norm of autonomy is at risk of unilaterally attributing responsibility: If “getting a Job” only depends on an individual’s willingness for self-mobilization, failure can only be linked to the incapacities of the individual. As the quote shows, the frontline agent tries to accommodate for this pitfall – through bolstering the non-accomplishment of a promise, but also through developing a specific sensibility for the preconditions necessary to engage in a future promise. As frontline agents often stated, they try to provide a “rail” for the plans of the young persons, a “corridor” for realist and realisable plans, using their experience to assess the viability of specific self-set goals and future plans in order to protect the young person from the vulnerabilizing experience of (repeated) failure. At the same time, they must balance this guidance with the imperative of not prescribing actions to the young persons – they – as has been described in part 6.4.2, oscillate between “can do” and “should do”, always at the risk of acting paternalistic and interfering with the norm of autonomy.

I have termed this process (as reflected in the chapter title) the “production of a will” to designate the contradictory task of producing something that cannot be externally produced. A “will” is per definition something that emerges from the person, that is not forced upon somebody. As such, the creation of the client who can create himself necessarily happens through a form of the accompaniment of a process of self-mobilization and self-control that comes from the young person. Nevertheless, the confrontation with the norm of subjective self-mobilization is something actively enacted by the frontline agents. But the confrontation with this norm only becomes productive through the fact that the young person themselves adhere to the norm of subjective self-mobilization. As described in part 6.4.3, the contractual tool “creates” this adherence as a “powerful pedagogical motor” (Pataroni 2005) that on the one side presupposes an autonomous accountable subject and on the other – performatively creates it through presupposing it. In addition, the negotiation of the integration contract contains an important time dimension, that is highly relevant to the issue of transitions. It is only through introducing a time dimension into the contract (promise *today* to do something specific *tomorrow*) that it becomes relevant for the biographical transition and the linked elements of identity transformation. “Getting up” by time tomorrow morning is linked to larger action chains that ultimately lead to a job interview, the far teleological horizon is clearly defined, both within an administrative-temporal order (see chapter 6.5.2 –

the duration of participation in the SeMo is limited to six months, with specific tasks to be performed each month), as well within the subjective biographical time of the young person. The tool of the contract tightly couples the process narrative self-construction to the administrative temporal order: “the emphasis put on the time dimension in the citizens’ contracts, on the client as projected into the future, ensures the continuity of the self-occupation” (Andersen 2007: 139).

#### 6.4.5. Subjectivation Practices: Valuation and the Preparation to the Conventional Demands of the Labor-Market

While the previous description of the Gate-keeping activities and its effects clearly point to a subjectivating and normalizing power that induces young people to develop a specific (individualistic) self-understanding of their transition, the activities of the Motivational Semester are more ambiguous, and a clear line between “enabling” and “subjectivating” effects of interventions is mostly hard to draw. In their roles as intermediaries of the labor market (see chapter 6.3), frontline workers certainly proceed to a “sorting out” of young people according to evaluative criteria of the labor market. At the same time, they also may act as “translators” of these demands for some youngsters, attempting to delineate possible templates for self-description that account for the sometimes-vulnerable young people’s self-understanding. Chapter 6.4. has shown that the young persons are not only processed but also selected and evaluated according to the normative criteria of fit of potential training companies. Much more, competent persons are *constructed* and *created* based on different Orders of Worth. As described in this chapter, much of this work happens through the provision of an “institutional incitement to speak” (Foucault, 1978: 18), in which a narrative is manufactured in organizationally circumscribed ways. The fashioning of “accepted” integration narratives happens mainly through confronting young persons with an evaluative vocabulary that resonates within the evaluative frameworks of the labor market and that at the same time guides the self-reflection process of the young persons. Individual experiences are re-interpreted from the background of the evaluative repertoire of a potential employer. Or, in the words of one professional commenting a situation where young persons are asked to fill out self-evaluation questionnaire: *“the hard work is to make them explain why they think that this adjective corresponds to themselves, that means, they have to give examples and explain situations, why they think they are like this or like that”* (I.11.:537-539). Young people learn to describe themselves and to justify their own capacities and competencies, to describe themselves within the evaluative frameworks of employers. This amounts to learning forms of self-presentation: *“When they are in front of an employer, and he asks for their qualities, their strengths they have to know what to say”* (I.4.:878-879). the creation of specific ways of presenting oneself is an act of submission and a mean of control. The condition for becoming a subject is – if one follows

Judith Butler and Michel Foucault – the subjection below a specific symbolic order that controls, to a certain extent how the subject’s identity is formed. The formation of the subject is according to Judith Butler, based on subordination and of recognition through others, the self-presentation can be interpreted as an act of subordination, which aims at producing a marketable self, a self that is “intelligible” (Butler 2004: 42) and recognizable by the symbolic orders of the labor market. The sociology of conventions, in turn, would describe such a process as a practice in which young people incorporate the adequate vocabulary to pertain as a publicly qualified person in the “tests” with which young people are confronted when entering the labor-market. And in fact, when putting to light the concrete practices involved in practicing these forms of self-presentation that are intelligible within the evaluative repertoires of potential employers, we see that these do seldom involve the simple confrontation with an existing symbolic order, but that they amount to a “maieutic of subjectivity” (see above) in which specific aspects of the life-world of the young person are highlighted in order to craft a positive integration narrative and to provide possible “evaluative supports” for the confrontation with one’s own biographical future.

This becomes particularly visible in those cases in which young persons do not dispose of those recognized characteristics that allow them to become visible and intelligible within the evaluative Frameworks of the labor market. As it goes, many of the young persons do not dispose of those qualities (educational certificates, work experience a.s.o.) that are recognized in the evaluative “tests” of the labor market. In the words of the economy of conventions, they are evaluated as “small” in the common Orders of Worth that govern the selection of apprentices. The following quote shows that frontline agents refer to a practice of valuation to highlight specific characteristics of the life-world of a young person to “make them count” in the public tests of a Job interview. This preparation for the public tests of the Job interview has a double effect: on the one side, it aims at “valorizing” characteristics of the young people to make them count in evaluations that the young person is exposed to when being confronted with relevant gate-keepers of the transition to work. On the other side, it also aims at enabling the young person to see himself in the light of these evaluation frameworks, generating a sense of self-confidence that might allow him to do the next step.

„practicing a sport, for an employer, it is an indicator of social competence: being able to work with people that you do not necessarily like, to constrain oneself to be on time. Nobody forces you to be on time, but you are on time for training. This can be of value to an employer. And sometimes we talk to a youngster for 10 minutes and he starts to see qualities in himself that will allow him to talk about himself in a job interview – all this allows to give him some self-confidence within a job interview” (l.3.: 978-984).

In this situation, the frontline agent translates, through a process of valuation between the private, youthful lifeworld reality of a person and more public forms of justification that aim at validity in the regime of justified action. Starting from familiar attachments, a person is constructed that can respond to more “public” forms of justification as enshrined in the job interview. Little by little – starting from private aspects of the person (practicing a sport in a club) – other forms of valuation are activated (for instance being able to work with people you do not like – the domestic order of worth, being on time – the industrial order of worth). Based on attachments in the close sphere that a person is constructed that becomes intelligible within the frameworks of the labor market. On the level of valuation and of attribution of competences, a “mediation” between the logic of valuation of employers and the “competence” of the person takes place. The frontline agent acts as an “intermediary” (Diaz-Bone 2015: 11). Backed by different quality conventions, he relates the different logics of valuation and creates a situated compromise between them. In this case, the SeMo acts as a “compromising device” (Thévenot 2001: 411) between different logics of valuation that one finds in its organizational environment. Second, in this process, the frontline agents propose adequate and situationally appropriate vocabularies of motives, of ways of displaying oneself, of ways of talking about oneself that make it possible for the young person to potentially become intelligible and recognizable in the public tests of the labor-market (see e.g. Dahmen 2019). This form of *pedagogical* accompaniment that this process of compromising implies operates (as described in chapter 6.2.3) with a temporary suspension of the official convention-based evaluative horizons (Breviglieri/Stavo-Debaugé 2007). It is only by acting “below the conventions” (*ibid.*), by temporarily suspending the evaluative frameworks of the labor-market that the young person becomes visible as a person with specific life-world attachments that then can be harnessed for the fashioning of viable integration narratives that potentially withstand the evaluation criteria of the labor market.

### **6.5. “Making Up” Viable Future Selves Through Evaluation - Working with the Portfolio-Tool**

The follow up of a young person usually starts with a standardized assessment of school competencies and a psychometric assessment of competencies and career choice. Usually, these psychological aptitude tests are deployed by a professional guidance psychologist in smaller groups. Thereupon, each young person receives individual feedback on his test results where both the psychologist as well as the personal counselor of the participant assist and where a discussion on possible professional pathways are discussed. The subsequent institutional work is documented in a fifty-page “portfolio”-tool which is gradually completed during the in-



take process period in the Motivational Semester, and which mainly consists of self-assessment questionnaires on personal competencies, capacities, and job preferences. This “portfolio-tool” has a pivot function between the rather administrative aspects and the concrete practices: Firstly, the same document is used in all Motivational Semesters of the cantons, its mandatory use is fixed in the provision agreement<sup>8</sup>. The portfolio is thus a standardised artefact that potentially gives insight in the internal organization of the Motivational Semester. As its use is mandatory it constitutes a “hinge” between the local case-based practices and extra-local political rationalities. Just like the document of the sanctioning described earlier, this document serves to align – trough it’s replicability in a multitude of contexts – to “coordinate people’s doings translocally” (Smith 2005: 166): On the one side, the doings of frontline agents in the different Motivational Semesters with the rationalities of the active-labor market policies of the state, but also the doings of young persons with the organisational goals of the Motivational Semester. As a “standardized artifact” (Wolff 2004: 284), the portfolio-document bears institutional traces that allow making inferences on the activities, intentions, and considerations of the creators of the document as well as their institutional identities and their interests. The portfolio-document is an “active agent in networks of action” (Prior 2008: 822), as a socio-material object (Schatzki 2001) it potentially mediates, configures and guides institutional practice. It has specific action programs inscribed in it (Akrich/Latour 1992: 259) highlights potentially institutionally relevant categories and invites to specific forms of description (Gubrium et. al 1989: 197), and offers through its construction a specific way of using it and highlights specific local doings and saying as an “institutionally actionable” (Smith 2005) reality. Nevertheless, the portfolio as an artifact does not unilaterally define practice. Rather, as research on medical records has shown, it has the potential to impact and transform social interaction while being “continually subordinated to the contingent requirements of the actual tasks” (Berg 1996: 501). The following analysis does not look at the concrete use of the document “in action” but focusses on its programmatic and institutional traces. Even without an ethnomethodological turn-for turn analysis of the in-situ use of the document, it is possible to analyze the potential of the portfolio to prefigure specific practices and to evaluate its function within the larger workings of the institution. A specific focus will be put on the ways it positions the

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8 As described in the Provision agreement for SeMo by the cantonal authority of employment measures the Motivational Semesters should provide a targeted Intervention that allows "An individual assessment about the participants' personal, family and school/professional situation/ A professional plan taking into consideration their interests", and a "balance between these plans and the competences of the participants by means of confrontation to the realities in the labor market". The use of a basic version of the mentioned Portfolio-document is mandatory. One of the official goals is thus to help the young participants to perform a "realistic and realisable" professional choice.

participants. Large parts of the document are designed to be completed alone or in (guided) group sessions. In addition, the documents contain a sort of trivialized career guidance test that is to be filled in individually. This character of the portfolio suggests focusing on the ways in which the young persons are positioned in the instructions and through the construction of the document. As such, the analysis will ask for the implicit and articulated “norms of recognizability and linguistic positioning” (Reh/Ricken 2012: 44, own translation), respectively the different “orders of worth” (Boltanski/Thévenot 1999) that guide the evaluation devices and lead them to attribute “greatness” or “smallness” to people in the light of these criteria. The latter constitute the normative grounding of the practical exercises and tests, the technical instructions, in the invocations and accentuations of the document: What are norms of suitable behavior? What visibilities are created through the document? What characteristics are made “institutionally” actionable? What kind of subject-positions are made intelligible in the document?

### 6.5.1. Elements of the Portfolio

The portfolio is a fifty-page document that every participant receives when entering the Motivational Semester. While many parts of the document are to be completed in individual sessions by the young participant, the portfolio is put in a personalized folder (containing, visible on the outsider, the name of the participant) that is stored in the office of the personal counselor of the young person. The young person has access to his folder on request, it is also used in group settings (for instance when collectively filling out a form that figures in it). This material dimension of the portfolio shows that it has a hybrid function: on the one side, it is directly at the hand of the individual counselor who can have all information on the progress of a case at a glance. In addition, as the young persons are asked to file all documents related to their job search activities in this portfolio, the counselor can evaluate and control the young person at a glance. On the other side, the portfolio contains roughly two-thirds of standardized self-evaluation texts and worksheets, in which young persons are asked to evaluate themselves according to descriptive criteria, to judge their scholarly abilities (and to rate them according to a traffic light system) or to write down potential job interests. The portfolio also contains evaluation questionnaires that are filled out by employers and the heads of the different workshops that the young participants participate in. The latter often contain tables with lists of different competencies and a likert-scale numeric evaluation scale ranging from green (best) to red (worst). They usually comprise a possibility for young people to self-evaluate their competencies.

### 6.5.2. Linking the administrative-temporal order of the Motivational Semester with practices of Self-Exploration

The first page of the portfolio is a kind of progression chart that describes different activities as a sequence of separated but interrelated activities. It is at the same time a table of contents that orders the portfolio using numbers (1-5) and different colors (red-blue). It describes different steps in a linear manner as a kind of action plan that starts with a competency assessment (1), career orientation (2) an evaluation report (3) and an action plan (4).

Figure 3 and 4: Portfolio Tool: “Progress Chart” (left) and “Checklist” (right)

Description	
1. Bilan de compétences	Qui suis-je ?
2. Bilan d'orientation	Qu'est-ce que je veux ?
3. Bilan d'évaluation	Qu'est-ce que je peux ?
4. Plan d'action	Quelles actions prévoyez-vous ?
5. Techniques de recherches d'emploi (TRE)	Comment me préparer ?
Recherche	

Check-list	
Bilan de compétences	
✓	Écrit
✓	Évalué
✓	Évalué
✓	Évalué
Bilan d'orientation	
✓	Écrit
✓	Évalué
✓	Évalué
✓	Évalué
Bilan d'évaluation	
✓	Écrit
✓	Évalué
✓	Évalué
✓	Évalué
Plan d'action	
✓	Écrit
✓	Évalué
✓	Évalué
✓	Évalué

Each of the 4 points lists sub-elements of the portfolio and are exemplified by a question (1: Who am I?, 2: What do I want?, 3: What am I able to do...). The young persons are described as “seekers”: an adequate action plan for one’s own professional future requires adequate knowledge on oneself, it presupposes thus that the young persons do not (yet) adequately know themselves. The questions figuring on the right side of the document display the process of choosing one’s profession as a linear process of self-exploration that is composed of adequate self-knowledge, knowledge on one’s own preferences and wishes as well as adequate knowledge on “what I am able to do”. On the left corner of the document, a box foresees some space for the name of the participant, the date, the name of the individual counselor, the date of entry and the “foreseen date of exit” from the Motivational Semester. These dates mark the time period in which the portfolio is meant to be worked on. The mentioning of these dates as well as the name of the individual counselor introduces a temporal order in which points 1-4 are meant to be executed and allocates

a personal counselor (Référent). Both elements introduce the document within an institutionalized framework. Participation in the Motivational Semesters is usually granted for an exact period of 6 months. As the next page shows, the portfolio foresees an exact time plan for the execution of the different tasks that figure in it. The checklist displays the different elements of the portfolio in the form of a chart that shows precise timelines for the different elements. For instance, the competency assessment is expected to be completed in one month. The box leaves extra space for a date of execution and for each smaller step, the signature of the individual counselor. The document seems rather to address the personal counselor who, through this document, is assigned a supervising authority for the timely execution of the tasks figuring in it. In addition, this part of the document introduces a clear temporal order of activities and links the execution of these activities to a timeline. One can expect that the everyday use of this document amounts to a progress report, the document ensures that the personal counselor keeps track of the progress of the participant. In addition, each of the colored steps is finalized in a synthesis (the fields with the grey background) in which the participant is asked to write up the previous results. The document seems to bear witness of an effort to synchronize the self-exploration activities of the participants with the temporal order of the measure, through linking different steps of an idealized job-search process with the 6 month-timeline of the Motivational Semester. The temporal inscriptions of the analysed form have a special relevance from the background of the subjective biographical dimension of transitions. On the level of the subject transitioning from school to work, comes with the social requirement to “to construct positive forms of relationships between their own time of life and social time” (Leccardi 2008: 124). The form, through the manifold temporal references and inscriptions creates a link between the social organisation of time (duration of the measure, date of entry, which themselves are dependent on the temporal organisation of schooling according to school terms and semesters), and the activities performed in the Motivational Semester that aim at fostering a specific, planificatory posture towards one’s own biography on the side of the participants.

### 6.5.3. Individual Self-Exploration and the Invocation of Individuality

The cover sheet of the first section (red – the “competency check”) of the portfolio document carries the phrase “every project is constructed from foundations – your personality, your interests, your school achievements, and your life experiences. This is what makes your particularity and provides you with the feeling of being unique” (portfolio document, p. 11.). This first sentence describes job choices as an individual self-project. Job choice is rooted in individual dispositions and characteristics, it is an expression of one’s own individuality and is an important element of authenticity (“being unique”). This resonates within the “inspirational city” (or

order of worth) in which greatness or high status pertains “the saint who achieves a state of grace or the artist who receives inspiration [...] It reveals itself in inspired manifestations (holiness, creativity, artistic sense, authenticity, etc.) (that) constitute the privileged form of expression” (Boltanski/Chiapello 2007: 25). Job choice is framed above all as expressions of one’s own unique dispositions and authenticity. This quote positions young people as “inspired” job searchers who strive towards the realization of their innate potentials to create. The notion of “project” is an important datum of this section. The phrase (as well as the whole construction of the portfolio) starts from the supposition that young people do – at least until now – lack knowledge about their potentialities, their capacities and the unique features that every person disposes of but that first have to be discovered. The grammar of the individualized self-project resonates with the idea of biographical self-construction in the era of individualization, in which a person learns to “conceive of him or herself as the center of action as the planning office with respect of his/her own Biography” (Beck 1992: 135). The positioning of the participant as a choosing individual driven by the desire for self-realization appears contradictory considering that many structural factors clearly limit the space of possible apprenticeships. Nevertheless, the absence of mentioning such structural factors in the first part of the portfolio, as well as the high emphasis put on personal autonomy, does not mean that there is an absence of power. On the contrary, the autonomy of the self is both objective and instrument of governmental rule in liberal democratic societies. Here power is productive rather than simply restrictive: “it provides individuals with new rationales and procedures for living their lives according to a regime of choice, and for governing themselves within an environment that offers a plurality of possible styles of life, and in which individual fate is recast as the outcome of personal acts of choice” (Rose 1998: 93). In the light of a plurality of lifestyles and possibilities and a necessary indifference of liberal democratic societies towards them, the governmental rule requires individuals to understand themselves as choosing, autonomous subjects. Tools such as the portfolio provide vocabularies of motives and narrative templates for self-construction, they provide (discursive) resources for conceiving oneself as a choosing subject. On the other side, if young people understand their potential future Job as an outcome of personal acts of choice, they are at the same time invoked as responsible for it. The grammar of the individual self-project leaves no spaces for structural explanations of your own fate. Failure can only be attributed to the individual.

#### 6.5.4. Self-Assessments as Tools for Self-Discovery

The first work-sheet of the portfolio contains a personal self-evaluation form. The document shows a self-assessment questionnaire in which young people are invited choose from a list of thirty qualifying adjectives (“active, adaptable, analytic,

communicative..”) and young persons are invited to “read them out loud and ask yourself to what extent they correspond to your personality”. A second page lists a number of activities grouped according to domains (“*needle-work, sewing, knitting, cultivation of flowers: Use my hands, calculating a budget, doing an inventory, write a text, use a personal computer: administrate, organize, planify, a.s.o.*”). The participants are asked to evaluate to what extent they master them. This tool invites young persons to inner dialogue about themselves. They are asked to reflect on themselves in the light of a list of pre-given items. Most importantly, the document invites to “choose” among items, the choice of some items is mutually exclusive (“shy” vs. “confident”). This means that young people will have to choose in a binary manner between adjectives that are deemed to qualify the whole “personality”. In addition, they refer to the person as a “whole” (no space is left for the possibility of being shy in some moments, bold in some others). The abstraction from situational expression of personal characteristics allows naturalizing these adjectives as expressions of the “whole” personality with congruent characteristics over time. In addition, the adjectives to choose from are not selected randomly, they rather remind a partly overstated, excessively positive vocabulary that reminds the vocabulary of job applications, it reflects a descriptive vocabulary that is normatively loaded with the requirements of the labor market. Young people are thus confronted with descriptive vocabulary and asked to apply it to themselves in a reflexive manner. The “norms of recognizability and linguistic positioning” (Reh/Ricken 2012) articulated in the document strongly reflects the evaluative frameworks of the labor market, the document opens up a discursive space in which each and every one is asked to position oneself, from the background of norms of intelligibility of the labor market. This has potentially subjectivating effects, as the document addresses young people regarding the question if their personality corresponds evaluative frameworks of the labor market. Participants learn, similarly to learning a new language, a vocabulary of self-description that makes them intelligible in the recognition orders of the labor market.

### 6.5.5. Panoptical Evaluation and Self-Improvement

A third document, the evaluation tool for the workshop provides a standardized list of different domains (professional competencies, personal competencies, relational competencies). Both the young person and the workshop leader are asked to evaluate on a four-point scale if the participant is for instance “able to follow the instructions, understands them, has an appropriate working rhythm, is orderly and cleanly”. A similar document exists for each internship a young person does during his stay at the Motivational Semester. This form is to be re-evaluated in regular time spans and the results of the evaluations are discussed during the regular counseling meetings. The constant use of such forms establishes a mode

of panoptical evaluation, where different persons (the workshop foreman, different employers, the counselor) establish a space of observation (Kelle/Schmidt 2017), in which the behavior of the young person is constantly evaluated. The document streamlines the observation of concrete doings and beings towards those characteristics that highlight operative functionality in the context of a firm. They constitute a specific space of evaluation that delimits the intelligible self-descriptions that are proposed to young people as templates for self-construction. As a kind of “recognition orders” these criteria define the space of doings and sayings that correspond to the functional requirements and the norms of suitable behavior of the small, production-oriented firm that in Switzerland constitutes the main provider of apprenticeships. Strictly speaking, the characteristics defined in the left column are not competencies in the narrow sense – no reference is made to specific, sector-related knowledge, or to general capacities (e.g. maths, writing). The characteristics rather describe dispositions and habits (disponibility, will to integrate in a new working environment, proactiveness, working rhythm) that are quite blurry descriptions and that leave ample space for interpretation (and requires no further explanation) on the side of the person evaluating them. This makes up their panoptical character – the space of observation does work without constant surveillance, as every behavior potentially can be subsumed under the large and fuzzy definitions at hand. Furthermore, the blurry concepts stand in sharp contrast to the colored scale in the right column that suggests an objective, quantified and commensurable metric (1=red: non-existent to 4=well developed).

Such a metric suggests objectivity and comparability (Espeland and Stevens 2008: 407) and a form of mechanical objectivity that is stripped of from subjective impressions. From the background of this discrepancy, one can assume that the institutional function of the instrument is not the purely “objective” measurement of competencies (the instrument seems to be too imprecise for this purpose) but that it has a different (additional) institutional function. As the form requires both the young person and the workshop manager to rate these different characteristics, its institutional function rather seems to be to confront the young persons with an exterior view. The form is often made relevant in one to one counseling meetings and the different assessment criteria are discussed in the light of concrete situations in the workshop. The vagueness of the description criteria is integral part if not precondition for doing so. The broad character of the items (“will to integrate, working rhythm, order and cleanliness, attitude towards the supervisor”) requires the person filling in the form to select from a wide range of concrete doings and sayings and to designate them as a relevant observation for the item in question. From the view of the person to be evaluated, the choice of relevant observations must appear random and arbitrary, as nearly every behavior may be subsumed to the evaluation categories in question and re-described and re-signified under the purview of the evaluative vocabulary of the firm.

Figure 5: Portfolio Tool: "Standardized Assessment Instrument"

1- Bilan de compétences					
Evaluation du Bilan d'entrée en atelier					
Nom, Prénom : _____		Date : _____			
Atelier : _____		Réfèrent : _____			
O = évaluation du responsable		X = évaluation du participant			
<b>Faites le point sur votre expérience en atelier. Évaluez jusqu'à quel point vous maîtrisez ces différentes compétences professionnelles, personnelles et relationnelles</b>					
Compétences professionnelles	prématuré				
Organisation du travail		●	●	●	●
Application des consignes		●	●	●	●
Compréhension des consignes		●	●	●	●
Qualité d'exécution		●	●	●	●
Utilisation des matières et du matériel		●	●	●	●
Rythme de travail		●	●	●	●
Ordre et propreté		●	●	●	●
Force et résistance		●	●	●	●
Compétences personnelles	prématuré				
Ponctualité		●	●	●	●
Concentration		●	●	●	●
Volonté d'insertion		●	●	●	●
Assiduité		●	●	●	●
Intérêt au travail, engagement		●	●	●	●
Adaptation aux règles		●	●	●	●
Autonomie		●	●	●	●
Capacité à évaluer le travail		●	●	●	●
Disponibilité		●	●	●	●
Prise d'initiative		●	●	●	●
Compétences relationnelles	prématuré				
Capacité d'écoute		●	●	●	●
Respect d'autrui		●	●	●	●
Mode d'expression		●	●	●	●
Relation au groupe		●	●	●	●
Attitude envers le responsable		●	●	●	●
Capacité à communiquer ses rendez-vous &		●	●	●	●
COMPETENCES PROFESSIONNELLES	COMPETENCES PERSONNELLES	COMPETENCES RELATIONNELLES			
Mes points forts :	Mes points forts :	Mes points forts :			
-	-	-			
-	-	-			
Objectifs à travailler :	Objectifs à travailler :	Objectifs à travailler :			
-	-	-			
-	-	-			



The page analyzed exemplifies a pattern that re-emerges in different places of the portfolio tool. First, a descriptive matrix similarly to a psychological “test” that displays and objectifies the space of possibilities (the standardized, color-rated items), and that classifies and positions the individual according to his “measured” dispositions. The display of these dispositions in terms of numbers (1-green to -4 red) goes hand in hand with a pseudo-mathematical transformation of observed qualities into comparable quantities. As soon as transformed into numbers, it becomes possible to display the observed qualities as if they were normally distributed. An item classified red implies that this item is “lower” than normal, that it is less well developed than the average. The different competence domains (as well as the numbers 1-4) constitute an epistemic horizon, a matrix that is the precondition for the valuation of individuals within that specified test. In a second step, this has a potential impact on the self-interpretation and the self-understanding of a person. Once a person is classified, the person potentially begins to understand oneself as a person of “that type” (for instance a person with a low ability “to follow the instructions”). The person understands oneself within the epistemic horizon of the test. This process is subtle, as even when a person does not agree with the classification, the epistemic horizon still remains potentially intact, and is the background for the scrutiny of judgments and evaluations. Third but not least, the test (and the underlying evaluative matrix) has itself the potential to bring into being the personal characteristics it is supposed to measure. Persons are “interactive kinds” (Hacking 2004) which means the categorizations and classifications do something with them and to them. Persons are – once the epistemic matrix established – acting under that description. Just as Reay and Wiliam put it in their analysis of SAT-Tests in the UK, the evaluative practices at the SeMo aim at the “construction of identity through assessment” (Reay/Wiliam 1999: 343). During this process, behavior is re-signified in institutionally circumscribed ways: While behavior of peer-group related youthful insubordination may often be tolerated in a school context, it becomes a “red” mark in the field “adaptation to rules” in a work context as it is re-interpreted as lack of respect from authorities.

### **6.5.6. Biographical Self-Scrutiny and the Continual Limitation of the Space of Possibilities**

While the first part of the portfolio mainly seems to address youngsters as individual choosers of their professional future that have to pursue a process of self-exploration in order to determine what individual characteristics they dispose of, part two and three of the portfolio introduce, forms of biographical self-scrutiny and patterns of reflexive self-evaluation that -little by little - link these individual characteristics to the space of institutional possibilities. After having gained “objectified” knowledge on own characteristics, young people are invited to reflect on

the implications of that knowledge for their subjective future-oriented self-construction and – particularly in part three – for their structural possibilities. The limitation of structural possibilities (e.g. what possible jobs enter the larger field of envisioned futures) does not happen in a prescriptive, stipulative way – nobody tells the young persons that they imperatively should choose this or that apprenticeship. Rather, the structure of the portfolio-tool as well as of the instruments strive towards the subjective incorporation of structural limitations. The adaptation of the “possible” to the probable” (Bourdieu 1990), the coupling between what you “want” and “what you can get” operates through a process of textually-mediated self-formation. The “pedagogies of expertise” (Rose 1998: 93) spell out the space of the possible, the young persons align their self-scrutiny to these categories: “as I am this or that kind of person, I might consider choosing this or that job”. As Rose puts it:

“Governing in a liberal-democratic way means governing through the freedom and aspirations of subjects rather than in spite of them. The possibility of imposing ‘liberal’ limits on the extent and scope of ‘political’ rule has thus been provided by a proliferation of discourses, practices, and techniques through which self-governing capabilities can be installed in free individuals in order to bring their own ways of conducting and evaluating themselves into alignment with political objectives” (Rose 1998: 155).

One example of the continual limitation of the space of possibilities is the boxes that are displayed on the bottom of the Instrument (see figure 5). Here the young person is asked to write down his strengths and his weaknesses (“points to work on”) for each domain (professional competencies, personal competencies, relational competencies). In sharp contrast to the pre-given, standardized likert-scaled items on the list, the form keeps an empty space for a hand-written note by the young person. As there is limited space, the young person will necessarily have to choose one or two strengths and weaknesses from the list and write them down. The requirement to choose among the list implies that the person scrutinizes the list of items first and prioritizes it by himself. The instrument invites the young person to apply the descriptive categories of the epistemic matrix of the instrument into his own self-scrutiny and to align and synchronize the classifications of the instrument with his own self-understanding. In the context of the SeMo, this self-scrutiny gets institutionalized on a regular basis – as such, youngsters are called – in the process of self-exploration that the portfolio document deems to foster, to re-evaluate how they are faring after one month of participation (“Assess, after one month of participation in motivational semester. Think and evaluate to what extent you master these different professional, personal and relational competen-

cies<sup>9</sup>). As such, the first part of the Portfolio concludes with an overall synthesis-page in which the young person should “choose from the different forms that you have completed” and to describe “my three biggest qualities”, my “strong points”, “what I know to do well”, but also “my weaknesses”.

### 6.5.7. Linking the Biographical to the Structural: Learning to Describe Oneself in the Evaluative Vocabulary of the Labor-Market

The third part of the portfolio to be done during the second and third month of participation includes a “inventory of dream jobs” (*“list three professions that you dream of to exercise”*) an inventory of realised personal and professional activities (*“list your professional experiences, internships, babysitting, sport, clubs, and associations. Evaluate to what extent you liked them and say why”*). The young people are invited to think about their future (*“Where do I see myself in five years – what is important to me”*) and are demanded to think about what they do or don’t like in their potential future job. Participants fill a standardized interest test which leads to a “personality profile” with different “factors of interests” and which then are connected to different professional domains. This part of the portfolio resumes in a synthesis in which young people are demanded to fix up to five occupations that they want to explore. The third part invites the young participants to *“starting from your experiences, evaluate to what extent the jobs you have chosen are realizable”*. Young people are invited to explore if a chosen job “is made for them” (green) “could eventually convene under specific conditions”, or “is not for me” (red). Hereby, they are required to take into account their “school assessment” their “competency assessment”, their “internship certificates”, information sheets on the profession in question, and so on. For each profession, young people are asked to respond to the following questions: *“What kind of work involves this job? What do I have to be good at in order to do this job? What are the conditions of admission? What are principle school branches for such an apprenticeship?”*.

The fashioning of a “viable” future self, of a biographical plan that can withstand the evaluation criteria of employers thus passes through justifying his own preferences, through a sort of guided self-exploration – a work on oneself that leads to the formulation of one’s own desires. The realization of these different tests results in an “individualized integration agreement”, In which the young person is demanded to *“planify, together with the counselor, based on the assessments, the action plans, and the Interviews the objectives that allow the realization of your project”* (Portfolio, part 4). These objectives, each provided with a precise date of enactment, a deadline, means and indicators (“proofs”) of achievement, are then signed by both the young person and the counselor.

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9 Original Document not displayed, this sentence is found at the end of the part 1 (“competence assessment”) of the portfolio.

## 6.6. Guided Self-Exploration as a “Narrative Machinery” that Produces Intelligible Subjects

We see that this institutional arrangement that is constituted by an intensive counseling and a portfolio-guided self-assessment guides the young person to a process self-assessment. It puts the service user in a position in which he analyses his past life, defines certain characteristics of his personality, unfolds his motivations and his interests in order to make emerge a professional project and to examine its viability according to the actual conjunctures on the labor market. It incites the young person to perform a “work on oneself”, to develop a desire for a specific professional future appearing open and uncertain to himself. Nevertheless, the portfolio work unfolds itself in an area of tension between institutional demands (for instance specific pre-conditions to enter a specific apprenticeship) and individual self-thematization. The young person is invited to see himself with the eyes of employers, to integrate a specific vocabulary into his own self-descriptions. One’s own conception of the self is molded within the categories that are relevant for getting a job, and these categories are taken up for guiding the attention during the process of biographical introspection, they are “used” for the interpretation of own experiences. This amounts to a kind of “biographical work” (Gubrium and Holstein 1998), in which the young person integrates new experiences into his own self-description by means of specific institutionally provided interpretation patterns. It is through this activity that the young person develops self-descriptions that are “intelligible” for other interaction fields – in this case – the world of work. The portfolio work attempts to show hidden competencies, previous experiences, and so on, and tries to make them useable, utilizable for the transition to employment through specific practices of valuation (see chapter 6.3.4.) Personal counselors encourage the participants to perform an interpretation of their biography and their previous experiences that is geared towards recognizing specific resources and competencies and that can be integrated into their professional selves, for instance, in their self-presentation during recruitment interviews. Private life-world experiences are reassessed from the perspective of the requirements of a potential profession. This encouragement tries to create a link between two spheres where previously no link existed: between the life-worlds experiences of youngsters and the “world of work”, having its own economies of recognition, its own orders of worth and its own relevancies. The portfolio can be seen as a form of “biography-generator” (Hahn 1998, see chapter 4), an “institutional incitement to speak” (Foucault, 1978: 67), in which the young persons are invited to re-tell their experiences, and to re-interpret them from the background of the relevancies of the world of work. Hahn defines biography generators as historically contingent devices “that urge the person to account for himself, to present his life-course, also rough acts of selection and fictionalization, into an autobiographical pattern” (Hahn 1987: 22). Hahn describes that mod-

ern dispositives of discipline and control have played a crucial role in the making of narrative identity: “especially Foucault, but also in a different way, Elias has demonstrated that modern civilization is tied to processes of increased self-control which are increasingly internalized” (Hahn 1987: 22, own translation). Just like in a religious confession – where an unsparing truthfulness towards oneself is bound to lead to a form of self-knowledge that is meant to lead to a self-improvement and a better self-containment – the portfolio aims at inciting the young person to think about himself, to observe himself and to disclose and reflect his own life and his own learning process. Just like in the religious confession, the findings of these introspections have to be communicated, written down, and are eventually used for the fashioning of socially mediated self-presentation.

### 6.6.1. Activating a Biographical “Care” for the Self

We see that the portfolio contributes to the “transmission of macro and meso-structures into micro-sociological – meaning life-course decision and biographical actions of individuals during transitions between life-phases” (Struck 2001: 22). As described by Leisering, the complex interdependency of an individual’s life-courses and institutions ask from individuals a “biographical far-sightedness” (Leisering 2004). In the portfolio, young people are incited to develop biographical reflexivity, the portfolio – so one could contend, activates a biographical preoccupation with the future, and installs a planificatory posture towards one’s own biography: “Who could I be?” “What Job fits my personality?” “What options do I have – under the current labor-market conditions?”. The job choice process, as depicted by in the portfolio comes with an individualistic hue – the pronominal form, the “I” that speaks from every page and every phrase, the “active voice” form depicts the process of job choice as an “individual self-project”, as a kind of choice biography. The initial demand to write down three “dream jobs” on the one side deliberately abstracts from and ignores both the strict regulation of the occupation-education link of the Swiss apprenticeship system and on the other side possible internal limitations, for instance the self-elimination of lower-class youth from specific, more demanding apprenticeships. As such it may rather enhance existing class-based inequalities rather than counter them. In a certain sense, the portfolio is appealing to the (unequally distributed) “projective element of Agency” (Emirbayer/Mische 1998: 962) as it calls upon the young participants to develop representations of possible future selves, and incites the young persons to produce narratives of possible futures that are realist and realizable and that “keep the road” in front of the evaluations of the labor-market. In chapter 6.4 I have proposed to conceive the task of the Motivational Semesters as a preparation for the evaluative tests of the labor market. Within the theoretical framework of the sociology of conventions, the process of recruitment, and more precisely of a job interview has been conceived

as a test where a person is evaluated according to some standardized repertoire of evaluation. The fashioning of “accepted” integration narratives, the description of one’s own experiences and biographical experiences from the Background of the evaluative repertoire of a potential employer is not only mediated through the portfolio, but relies on a whole range of exercises (e.g. the training of self-presentation skills, the preparation of applications and CVs, and the incorporation of the adequate vocabulary to pertain as a publicly qualified person in the “tests” with which young people are confronted when entering the labor market).

As one professional describes his work with the portfolio, “the hard work is to make them explain why they think that this adjective corresponds to themselves, that means, they have to give examples and explain situations, why they think they are like this or like that”. Young people learning to describe themselves and to justify their own capacities and competencies the evaluative frameworks of employers can be seen as a process of learning adequate forms of self-presentation. The portfolio and the creation of specific ways of presenting oneself is an act of submission and a means of control. The condition for becoming a subject is – if one follows Judith Butler and Michel Foucault – the iterated subjection to a specific symbolic order that defines and limits the space in which the subject’s identity is formed. The formation of the subject being according to Judith Butler, based on subordination and of recognition through others. The self-presentation in the portfolio can be interpreted as an act of subordination, that aims at producing a marketable self, a self that is “intelligible” and recognizable by the symbolic orders of the labor market. Participants are addressed as managers of their own labor-power, they are called to experience themselves as “competent” and to “write” these competencies down in order to make them “readable” for specific gate-keepers. The institutional injunction is a biographical one (Duvoux 2009) and amounts to the injunction to expose yourself to the demands of a social world, to relate somehow to the demands of social life and produce self-descriptions that are intelligible and compatible with it at the risk of social exclusion. This process corresponds to what in biographical research is referred to as “biographical reflexivity” or “biographicity” (Alheit and Dausien: 2000: 405) thus the subjective processes in which socially embedded actors are interpreting their biographical trajectory and revise, re-see, and re-judge their projects at central biographical turning points. If transitions can be described – from a subjective side as a “temporal articulation of the ‘subjective’ (or the biographical) with the structural” (Dubar 1994: 283, own translation), the organisational technologies described clearly foster these processes through inducing the young persons to project themselves into a highly structured opportunity space. Within this process, the norm of autonomy plays a central role. As described in chapter 6.5.3 and 6.5.4, young persons are addressed as individual biographical choosers, professional futures are displayed as outcome of an individual process of choice. The described processes of self-exploration that aim at putting the indi-

vidual into a specific, planificatory projective relationship towards itself operates from the background of an institutionalized norm of autonomy. It is this norm of autonomy that produces an intense and continuous self-scrutiny and self-evaluation. The focus on individuality serves as a guiding norm that urges “to discover who we really are, to realize our potentials and shape our lifestyles, we become tied to the project of our own identity and bound in new ways into the pedagogies of expertise” (Rose: 1993: 93). This focus on individuality is strongly linked to emergence of the modern life-course.

The institution of the life-course, and the self, infused with the idea of individual authorship of its biography is thus the outcome of a process in which persons are meant to operate the participation in different “interaction fields” (Levy 1996). As such, the communication with the personal counselors in the motivation semesters is a social system that fosters a potential inclusion in the subsystem of the economy, that – as the theory of functional differentiation describes, decides on their formal membership definitions itself. Individualized counseling, the use of self-assessment instruments as well as the contractualised individual integration agreements react to a breakdown of communication (young persons generally do not dispose of clear, compatible self-descriptions that would foster inclusion) or to “tensions” between the psychic system of the youngsters and the functional system of the economy (young persons do not display the “right” self-descriptions allowing an inclusion) and tries to transform them into communication. The reference point of the practices at the SeMo that aim at producing intelligible subjects are those “discursively articulated norms of recognizability” (Buschmann/Alkemeyer 2017: 20) that are embedded in the epistemic matrix of the used instruments and in the doings and sayings of the welfare professionals.

## 7. General Conclusion and Discussion of Main Results

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The present study aimed at analyzing “activation in action”. It aimed at analyzing – beyond the formal policy designs – how a specific, legally coded policy is implemented and transformed into specific organizational practices. How do rules, structures, and discourses of the activating state become operative in concrete actions of frontline professionals? Results described in the previous chapter show that the paradigmatic transformation towards an active welfare state translates into specific challenges on the frontline level of policy implementation and confronts frontline agents with contradictory demands that must be dealt with “in situ”. The study has shown furthermore that policy prescriptions are not unilaterally translated into practice, but that they become operational only through the mediation with other institutional logics, the situated demands of practice and the contingent requirements of the actual task at hand. In addition, the study has shown that rules and regulations (for instance sanctioning rules) are practically transmitted through their physical carriers – that is – documents, forms and descriptive devices that find their way into organizational life only through the situated activation by “competent” actors. Through showing how organizations act as compromising devices (Thévenot 2001a: 410) for irreconcilable institutional logics, the study contributes to the field of human service organization and on the issue of discretion in SLB-research. The study has shown that discretion is not the antipode of strict rationalized “implemented as designed” approaches and shows that rules and regulations (such as the sanctioning procedure) act as sense-making structures for an otherwise insecure and underdetermined practice. Through the framework of the economy of conventions that focusses on the analysis of situations of coordination, this research has furthermore contributed to introducing a new promising theoretical lens into social work and human service organization research. One of the main findings of the study is that the SeMo does not work despite discretion but requires considerable discretion to work to function at all. As Zacka puts it, street-level agents at the Motivational Semester are

“exposed to a plurality of normative demands that frequently point in competing directions: they must be efficient in the use of public resources, fair in dealing



with clients, responsive toward their needs, and respectful when interacting with them. The proper implementation of public policy depends on their capacity to remain sensitive to these plural demands and to balance them appropriately in light of specific situations” (Zacka 2017: 11).

As such, discretion and the coordination work, invisible in rationalized models of institutional work, are a precarious pre-condition for the policy to function. This main finding will be elaborated on in subsection three of this chapter. In addition, the study can provide an insight into the mechanisms through which measures that aim at preparing youngsters for the apprenticeship market manage to do their job. The SeMo is not able to impact the demand side (the number of apprenticeship places) and thus must focus on supply-side factors – that is the characteristics of their participants and how potential employers see them. In a nutshell: the SeMo can change the order in the waiting line for entering the apprenticeship system, but it is not able to reduce the length of the waiting line. The (structural) reasons for this – as well as potential solutions to this problem – have been described in chapter 2. As such, the SeMo – just as most supply-side policies – cannot be expected to effectively reduce existing inequalities on the apprenticeship market. The organizational response to the limited possibility to impact the demand side implies an organizationally pertinent classification-system that thoroughly (re)-classifies a structural lack of apprenticeship places into “employability troubles”. The descriptive devices of the SeMo interpret the “problem” in a way it becomes treatable and manageable with the technologies at disposition in the organization. This explains why the SeMo puts that much emphasis on individual competencies, on individualized counseling and coaching and on the professional orientation process as a reflexive self-project. This individualization of the problem of youth unemployment makes it “treatable” on an individual level. The downside of this organizationally driven institutionalized individualism is that it operates with a conception of an autonomous individual that barely can withstand an empirical test (see chapter 3.1.4.) and that attributes responsibility to subjects for a situation for which they are not to blame. The individualized treatment of employability troubles turns fate into choice and potentially leads to devastating effects on the side of subjects. If responsibility can only be attributed to the individual, it can only blame itself in case of failure. In the third subsection of this chapter (7.2.5. “Risks and Limits of Institutionalized Individualism”) I will describe the potential implications of this result more deeply. The organizational technologies employed in the people changing activities of the SeMo can be subsumed under the heading “subjective self-mobilization”. One main contribution of this study is to shed light on the potential subjectivation processes of the practices within ALMP’s for school leavers. The potentials for subjectivation are inscribed in a wide range of institutional technologies, artefacts, and practices that participate in the institutional production of

subjects. The contribution of the study for Research on subjectivation is described in a separate subchapter (7.2.) of this conclusion, in which I will further discuss and differentiate the observed institutional technologies for subjectivation. In the last part of this chapter I will briefly discuss the implications of the theoretical framework of the present study and describe its implications for future research.

### **7.1. Organizations as the “Missing Link” for the Mediation Between Systemic Requirements and Subjectivity**

Starting from a life-course approach (chapter 3) this research identified organizations of the welfare state as a “missing link” for the transmission of normative requirements related to the standard life-course. The theoretical elaborations in chapter 3 have identified that the normative “modeling” (Leisering 2003) of the life-course should not simply be analyzed on the level of sequences and positions. Based on a dual conception of the life-course (subjective vs. objective trajectory (Dubar 1998), life-course vs. biography, (Kohli 2007)), this research has shown that the transmission of systemic requirements and expectations does not happen directly/first-hand (normative structures → subjects). Rather, they are mediated by organizations and welfare practices (normative structures → welfare state organizations → welfare practices → subjects). This becomes particularly pressing as the operational goals of the welfare state is undergoing a profound change: In the context of the active welfare state, income replacing monetary transfers are declining in favor of person-centered pedagogical measures. This particularly applies for young persons in transition from school to work who – at least in Switzerland – have become one of the central addressees of the active welfare state. The strong focus on enhancing the pressure to enter initial vocational training, the implementation of a strict rights and responsibilities regime and the design of incentive structures deemed to enhance the propensity of young persons to look for an apprenticeship translate – on the level of the subject – as increased demands for self-optimization, self-regulation and individual responsibility. The “systemic demands” are not restricted to an enhanced focus on employability but imply a specific form of liberal “selfhood”, that is strongly linked to the emergence of the modern life-course. The institution of the life-course and of the self, infused with the idea of individual authorship of its biography, is thus the outcome of a process in which persons are meant to operate the participation in different “interaction fields” (Levy 1996) by themselves. As such, the people processing in the SeMo foster a potential inclusion in the subsystem of the economy, that – like the theory of functional differentiation describes - decides on their formal membership definitions itself (Bommes/Scherr 2000). Individualized counseling, the use of self-assessment instruments (6.5.4) as well as the proliferating use of contractualised individual integration agreements

(6.4) react to a breakdown of communication (young person generally does not dispose of clear, compatible self-descriptions that would foster inclusion or do not display the “right” self-descriptions allowing an inclusion) and tries to transform them into communication (see e.g. Großmaß 2006: 490). This results in demands for flexibilization that are mainly translated by welfare and education institutions. While life-course research has described how institutions (like the welfare state) impact on the pattern of socially defined, age-graded events and roles on a macro-level, it is often overlooked that these patterns necessarily only become active through entering the biographical orientations of actors. The life-course (or rather, its individual form, biography) is regulated on the level of the subject, in and through the practices at the frontline level of schools, social work agencies, and career counseling counters. The present study connects analytically research on the role of organizations for the regulation of the life-course (Struck 2001, Behrens and Rabe-Kleeberg 1992) and the work of Foucault-inspired research on the construction of subjects in human service organizations (Gubrium/Hollstein 1998, Dean 1995, Andersen 2007). This allows putting light on processes of institutionally driven biography transformation taking place in concrete welfare organizations. Welfare organizations like the SeMo provide the “missing link” (Rosa 2018: 43) between systemic requirements as well as individual biographical orientations. The individualization of the autonomous actor of modernity, the demand for self-optimization, the demand to understand oneself as the planning agency of one’s own life-course is transmitted and institutionalized by and through organizational actors. The present study thus contributes to the emerging field of research that analyses contemporary forms of human service organizations and their impact on selfhood. In a recent piece of research, Hartmut Rosa et. al. analyse how “professional agents “translate” systemic requirements into individual aspirations in a process of two-way mediation that seeks to activate and motivate social actors in a specific way and at the same time helps them pursue their own aspirations through a particular, self-optimizing form of subjectivation” (Rosa et. al. 2018: 44). Just like the results of the present research study show, Rosa describes a two-way process in which social demands are not simply enforced. Much more, welfare agents partly tried to protect the individuals from excessive systemic demands through attenuating them and to connect them with individual conception of the “good life”. Rosa interprets this as a form of negotiation of divergent social demands. This parallels with some results of my research: As I have shown in chapter 6.2.3 and 6.4.4., while welfare agents confront young persons with systemic demands, they also display a specific sensibility for the deleterious effects of confronting them with demands that potentially might lead to forms of symbolic vulnerability. Up to deliberately acting against legal rules, frontline agents acted “below the conventions” (6.2.3) to accommodate for the close sphere of the young persons or in order not to “crush” their often fragile subjective motivation. This can indeed be described as a negotiation of divergent social

demands: Firstly, the demand deriving from the norm of institutionalized individuality according to which the exertion of paternalist disciplinary forms of power is problematic (resulting in the professionals reluctance to prescribe and enforce (6.4.2) the goals a person is submitting himself to), on the other side, the demand to normalize youngsters according to the functional requirements of the capitalist economy. With the notion of organizations as “compromising devices” (Thévenot 2001) I exactly intended to describe that process of negotiation by analyzing it in concrete situations and organizational arrangements. As the results show, the practice of balancing these different demands is a form of discretion and invisible work to be performed by the frontline agents that constitutes a precarious precondition for the functioning of the SeMo itself (seechapter 7.2.4.). At the same time, as I have shown for the negotiation of integration agreements (6.4.2), the idea of the subject that emerges within Rosa’s description is fully in line with an idea of modern welfare subjectivity that is “produced” in welfare organizations. Individualized forms of welfare production, focusing on the empowerment and the autonomy of the subject aim at contributing to the production of “individuality herself, independently capable of action and driven by her internal motivations” (Ehrenberg 1999: 311). In this context, the function of the SeMo is to align the “internal motivations” and preferences with the existing structural possibilities, the focus on self-realization through work is not mitigated, but harnessed and promoted in order to couple it with the circuits of economic usefulness of capitalist economy. This process is fully in line with a liberal democratic way of governing as described by Rose: “governing in a liberal-democratic way means governing through the freedom and aspirations of subjects rather than in spite of them” (Rose 1998: 155). Last but not least, the results of my study have to be read against similar research from the field of transition and social work research to which my study contributes by providing an in-depth analysis of the underlying social processes and practices: Based on an interview study, Düker and Ley (2013) describe that “social-pedagogical action entrenches in its clients the idea of a general legitimacy of the social order by pedagogically translating and flexibilising the regulations and behavioral imperatives of superordinate institutions” (Dollinger 2011: 232 cited in Düker and Ley 2012: 22, own translation). All the same, Andreas Walther writes that “social work [...] acts as a translating device between external (systemic) requirements and the (subjective) life-world interests and needs” (Walther 2011: 128, own translation). In this interpretation, the role of welfare institutions is to “flexibilise” and “translate” systemic demands into the life-world relevancies of young people. This can indeed be observed in the SeMo too, both on a synchronic (individual life-conduct) and a diachronic (biography) level: Behavioral characteristics (not being late, not being under the influence of illegal drugs when getting to work) that usually would lead to an exclusion from the scheme are attenuated so that the young person continually adapts to them and make these injunctions their own. The translation of societal

demands and their flexibilization also becomes visible when it comes to ensuring that young person's act out their biographical plans in a socially legitimized way – they ensure their intelligibility by supra-ordinate institutions and provide the vocabulary of motives to describe their professional project in a socially accepted way.

## **7.2. The institutional Production of Subjectivity: Biographisation – Valuation – Optimisation – Autonomisation**

This research study has highlighted the various technologies and practices of institutional production of subjects. The results show that the “production of people by human service workers in organizationally circumscribed ways” (Hollstein 1992: 33) amounts to a form of social control that focusses less on direct disciplinary control than a more or less subtle exercise of power that produces the “self”. The fact that “soft” technologies for the production of subjects prevail, even in a policy with potentially relatively strict disciplinary elements, is a surprising result. Other research that analyzed activation in action has identified a contradictory mix between “client-centeredness” and “compulsion” (Lindsay and Mailand 2004: 196), that is relevant in the SeMo to a lesser extent than expected. This finding can be explained by the special focus group that the SeMo are dealing with (young people in a very specific age-range). In the following section, I will quickly sum up the results on the “institutional production of subjects” and discuss them by highlighting four central processes that undergird them. This allows locating the often dispersed practices within ideal typical modes of institutional production of subjects. Through discussing the results on the level of middle-range theories, I expect to contribute to a better description of the subjectivation processes at work in contemporary human service organizations. The three subsections (Biographisation – (E-)Valuation and Mediation Optimisation) should thus be read as a description of processes at work in the SeMo that can serve as “sensitizing concepts” (Blumer 1954) for future research.

### **7.2.1. Biographisation**

The results show that many of the practices in the SeMo aim at producing and fostering self-reflection and self-descriptions that refer to temporal distinctions. In the practices in the SeMo, young people are incited to develop biographical reflexivity and projective self-descriptions that have a clear future orientation. For example, the portfolio instrument described in chapter 6.5 clearly aims to activate a biographical preoccupation with the future and installs a planificatory posture towards one's own biography: “Who could I be?”, “What job fits my personality?”,

“What options do I have – under the current labor market conditions?”. The job choice process, as depicted by in the portfolio comes with an individualistic hue – the pronominal form, the “I” that speaks from every page and every phrase, the “active voice” form depicts the transition process as an “individual self-project”, as a kind of choice biography. The request in the portfolio to write down three “dream jobs” can be interpreted as being part of an organizational technology that tries to appeal to the (unequally distributed and highly demanding) “projective element of agency” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998) as it calls upon the young participants to develop representations of possible future selves, and incites them to produce narratives of possible futures that are realistic and realizable and that “keep the road” in front of the evaluations of the labor market. These practices foster biographical work, which is “a distinctive kind of reality-constructing activity that deals specifically with the interpretation and representation of lives in relation to the passage of time” (Gubrium and Holstein 1995: 212). Biographical work is the work performed by subjects to maintain a coherent biographical narrative when confronted with turning points, demands that emerge from life-course transitions or the need to re-arrange biographical plans. This process corresponds exactly to what biographical research describes as “biographical reflexivity” or “biographicity” (Dausien and Allheit 2000), as the subjective processes in which socially embedded actors are interpreting their trajectory and revise, resee, and rejudge their projects at central biographical turning points. If transitions can be described – from a subjective side – as a “temporal articulation of the “subjective” (or the biographical) with the structural” (Dubar 1994: 263, own translation), these organisational technologies clearly foster these processes through inducing the young persons to project themselves into a highly structured opportunity space. In the SeMo, classic situations for biographical work are for instance the flexibilization of job aspirations or the need to deal with disappointed expectations. To make it understood: biographical work is not performed by the SeMo but can only be carried out by the subject. Nevertheless, the SeMo provides a range of occasions, of clues, of techniques through which biographical work is fostered. The SeMo provides an “institutional incitement to speak” (Foucault, 1978: 67) that creates the self-reflexive activity in which young persons are invited to re-tell their experiences and to re-interpret them from the background of the relevancies of the world of work. When young people are asked to define their so-called “professional integration project”, they are asked to start from their past, their hobbies, their aspirations and to build on them to develop future plans. The individual “professional integration project” connects the past to the future through a present activity of self-scrutiny, of narrative self-exploration. The weekly counseling sessions are situations in which the young person is asked about their plans, their feelings and their ideas. These situations are “biography generators” (Hahn 1995) insofar they are concrete situations in which a telling and re-telling of one’s own biography is institutionally required. This means

that biographies (as identities over time) are produced and reproduced by individuals interacting in institutionalized settings. People changing organizations do not stop at providing these occasions, in addition, they provide narrative frameworks for conveying personal experience and “incite participants to construct the stories they need to do their work” (Gubrium and Holstein 1998: 164).

### 7.2.2. (E-)valuation and Mediation

Chapter 6.3 has proposed to conceive the task of the Motivational Semesters as a preparation for the evaluative test of the labor market. Within the theoretical framework of the sociology of conventions, the process of recruitment, and more precisely of a job interview has been conceived as a test where a person is evaluated according to some standardized repertoire of evaluation. As has been described above, the processes of (e-)valuation play a central role in the opening “back doors” to employment for young people which otherwise would not have been selected by the regular recruitment mechanisms. The frontline agents provide internships to the young persons and manage access into otherwise disclosed job opportunities through performing a pre-screening of candidates that are considered as “placement-ready” and “stable”, for instance despite having poor school degrees. This practical work that leads to placing young people into internships and to make the “valuable” in the eyes of an employer can be described as a work of “valuation” and “mediation”. As intermediaries of the labor market (Eymard-Duvernay/Marechal 2006), frontline workers at the SeMo contribute to defining valuation through different activities and foster valuation frames that can improve the labor market opportunities of young persons. This work of intermediation and valuation happens “between general conventions of quality and more local conventions” (Bessy/Chauvin 2013: 96). The “bad student” with low labor-market prospects *becomes* the loyal, friendly and resilient co-worker, that an employer should give the opportunity for an internship as he has the proven (by the SeMo psychologist) competence status of a school leaver with a diploma. The “intermediating” activity of frontline agents involves “mov(ing) back and forth between different social worlds” (Bessy/Chauvin 2013: 98), the world of certificates, degrees, proofs of the labor market and the often “hidden” competencies of the young participants that become visible in the local setting of the SeMo and the world of work. It is adequate to use the concept of “translation” (Callon 1991) to describe these practices of “knowledge brokering” that do not consist in a simple transfer of knowledge, but in multiple activities of moving between places, of “*intéressement*” (Callon 1986: 185), of making readable the profile of the young persons in the potentially exclusionary tests of the apprenticeship market. As such, frontline agents describe the qualities one has seen in a young person that leads them to send him to the internship or to discuss if a candidate disposes of the right and sufficient set of qualities to be potentially considered as

an apprenticeship candidate. This work is ambiguous and risky – on the one side, one does not want to “burn” an employer and endanger the reputation of the Motivational Semester, on the other side, the task consists in promoting the qualities of a young person (“selling” the young person) while not disclosing too much of his potentially problematic characteristics. For doing so, the frontline agents refer to a whole repertoire of evaluation devices that are carried through different material carriers, and that makes them transportable through time and space (and as such – from the site of the SeMo to the site of a potential employer). The portfolio document (Chapter 6.5), the different testing devices of the SeMo psychologist, the evaluation forms on the abilities of the young persons, all these documents are the physical carriers that allow to transport valuations performed in the firm to the Motivational Semester (and vice versa) where they are “worked on” and integrated into the weekly meetings between the young person and his personal counselor. In the terminology of actor-network theory, the document constitutes an artifact that is able to “act at a distance” (Latour 1986) and influences the behavior of other human actors, it bridges two local sites. As chapter 6.3 shows, the personal counselors conceive their employer-related work as a “warrantor” for both the smooth course of the apprenticeship and the young person. Many young people at the SeMo lack a school diploma as conventional object that reduces uncertainty in recruitment decisions, and as such are excluded from entering the apprenticeship market. Frontline agents in the SeMo can harness alternative modes of valuation, that partly substitute a final school degree. In order to do so, the SeMo falls back to alternative valuation devices: in the case of a psychometric test to a device that can certify the equivalence of the cognitive abilities of a young person to a statistical reference group and the expertise of a psychological consultant, that allows an interpretation of these test results by laypersons and that certifies the aptitude of a specific applicant for a specific profession, and so on. These are concrete practices of valuation, in which – through considerable institutional effort and investment, the value that is required for “selling” a young person is institutionalized through specific practices. Frontline agents can activate alternative orders of worth (Dahmen 2019) and make them count in recruitment decisions of employers. Young persons that do not have the best school degrees and as such would never have passed the “gates” of the apprenticeship market might have alternative qualities that an employer might find attractive. In the words of the economy of conventions, frontline agents both create and modify frames of valuation – the young person might not have a good school degree, but he is “stable”, “motivated” a “team player” and “physically resilient” as his year-long commitment of playing football in a mid-league club testifies.



### 7.2.3. Optimisation

Processes of valuation and evaluation do not leave the evaluated persons indifferently. The continuous confrontation with specific evaluative vocabulary and different evaluative epistemic horizons constitutes a specific space of evaluation that delimits the intelligible self-descriptions that are proposed to young people as templates for self-construction. Insofar these processes are driven by an idea of perfectibility and individual self-betterment, they can adequately be described as optimization. A central tool that drives optimization is the different exercises and tests that are described in the portfolio tool (chapter 6.5). The described documents, self-assessment tools, practical exercises, and tests create specific visibilities and make them institutionally actionable through transforming them into transportable and treatable properties. This a multi-step process in which specific properties and characteristics of young people are described, captured and fixed. Observed qualities and behaviors are transformed into quantities and numbers – they are made commensurable (Espeland/Stevens 1998). Through this transformation, they become inscribable into files that can be used in a multitude of situations. The portfolio document acts as an “inscription device” (Latour 1990), observations become inscribed into figures and diagrams and are ready-made for further use. More importantly, the transformation of observations into a common metric (Numbers 1: very good – 4: unsatisfactory) suggests a normal distribution of these characteristics so that it makes individual learners comparable to each other and allegedly displays deviation from the statistical norm of a standardized reference group. Their semi-public display in the portfolio, making it visible for the young persons, the frontline agents and the employers, multiplies the situations in which young people are confronted with a comparative self-appraisal that points out on which concrete characteristics a person will have to work on. The portfolio tool is a technology for self-optimization. It invites the young person to apply the descriptive categories of the epistemic matrix of the instrument into his own self-scrutiny and to align and synchronize the classifications of the instrument with his own self-understanding. In the context of the SeMo, this self-scrutiny gets institutionalized on a regular basis – as such, youngsters are regularly called to self-track their progress and to re-evaluate how they are faring after each month of participation. As the title of chapter 6.5 suggests, these are technologies for “making up people” (Hacking), for creating the kind of persons they are designating. As shown in chapter 6.5.7, this also implies the adaptation of the “possible” to the probable” (Bourdieu 1990), the coupling between what you “want” and what you “can get”, that operates through a process of textually-mediated self-formation. The “pedagogies of expertise” (Rose 1998: 93) of the portfolio spell out the space of the possible, the young persons align their self-scrutiny to these categories: “as I am this or that kind of person, I might consider choosing this or that job”. For sure, the fashion-

ing of “accepted” integration narratives, the description of one’s own experiences and biographies from the background of the evaluative repertoire of the labor market happens not only through the portfolio, but through a whole range of exercises that have in common that they display individual skills and competencies as being intrinsic to one’s own personality and constitutive to who one is as a person (“Who are you?”). The young person learns to describe himself as a bundle of competencies and capacities and learns to evaluate himself in the light of specific social norms – in this case a social norm of self-realization and self-optimization – through potentially interiorizing them as a privileged relation to oneself.

#### **7.2.4. Discretion and Invisible Work as a Precarious Precondition for Successful Coordination**

This study has shown that the concrete implementation of activation measures relies on a multitude of processes of local interpretation of rules and situated compromises between rules and regulations and the situations at hand. As chapter 6.2 has shown, the rules and regulations of the sanctioning procedure are a constant source of negotiation and disagreement. Policy prescriptions (such as the sanctioning procedure analyzed in chapter 6.2) are not unilaterally translated into practice, but they become operational only through the mediation with other institutional logics, the situated demands of practice and the contingent requirements of the actual task at hand. On the one side, rules and regulations (for instance sanctioning rules) are practically transmitted through their physical carriers – that is – documents, forms, sanction catalogs a.s.o. that find their way into organizational life only through the situated activation by “competent” actors. This finding stands in stark contrast to the implicit rational-choice institutionalism of street-level bureaucrat theory (see chapter 4.1.2) or to approaches that romanticize the exertion of professional discretion. While the analyzed practices of sanctioning surely displayed a lot of discretionary interpretation of bureaucratized rules, the data does not allow to conceive this as the antipode of the strict rationalized “implemented as designed” sanctioning guideline. Much more, rules and regulations (such as the sanctioning procedure) act as sense-making structures for an otherwise insecure and underdetermined practice. This gets clearer if we consider the (organizational) reasons for the “creative” interpretation of sanctioning rules or the deliberate non-compliance with these rules. Firstly, the sanctioning rules must be analyzed as a textual device that coordinates the work processes in the SeMo across many different sites (Devault 2006: 294). The “sanctioning procedure” document is a device for managing the activities in different Motivational Semesters in Switzerland extra-locally. It is an attempt for “coupling” the hardly technologically processible activities of frontline agents with the strict “stick and carrots” activation regime of the unemployment insurance. As such, the sanctioning

rules are an externally imposed standard aiming at creating uniformity of sanctioning procedures in time and space. This standard, converted in a formal directive (the document in question) is then confronted by the practices of an occupational community (professional educators) and the institutional exigencies of the organization (dealing with complicated, not always compliant clients) at hand and produces incompatibilities that have to be dealt with both organizationally and individually. In neo-institutional theory, this process would probably be described as “decoupling” (March/Olsen 1976; Brunsson 2002). Due to conflicts between “institutional environment and task environment” (Boxenbaum/Jonsson 2017: 78), the SeMo decouples its formal structure (as a labor market measure financed by the local employment service) from their concrete people changing activities. This – so the neo-institutionalist argument goes – “enables organizations to seek the legitimacy that adaptation to rationalized myths provides while they engage in technical “business as usual” (Boxenbaum/Jonsson 2017: 78). The cause for the de-coupling of strict sanctioning rules and practice are manifold: an incompatibility between occupational norms of staff (adhering to an “educational” rather than an administrative logic) and “official” goals, the obvious inefficacy of strict sanctioning for doing “good” work but also the obvious inability of some participants to comply to the strict participation rules, thus the fact that the sanctioning regime assumes a rationally choosing user who rationally weighs the costs of a sanction with its benefits (e.g. sleeping longer or escaping (unpleasant) work). As the few examples, described in the previous chapters, show, this is obviously not the case. Youngsters usually displayed a strong willingness to become a participant in the world of work, reasons for sanctionable behavior where seldom pushed by a utility-maximizing behavior. On the organizational level, the resulting tensions led to the tendency of decoupling. When “zooming in” (Nicolini 2009) closer to the level of practice – as has been done in this study – one can see that these tensions become relevant in the practical dimension of institutional life. In such a close view on practice, it becomes visible that “logics are not purely top-down: real people, in real contexts, with consequential past experiences of their own, play with them, question them, combine them with institutional logics from other domains, take what they can from them, and make them fit their needs” (Binder 2007: 568). Rather than a one-dimensional loosely or strictly coupled organization, one sees that the compromises between the different rationalities and logics must be creatively coordinated and reconfigured on the level of the situation, on the level of client interaction. In chapter 6, I have used terms borrowed by the sociology of conventions to analyze this practice of creating fragile situated compromises between different rationalities. The example of applying sanctions, where frontline agents balance the strict demands of a bureaucratized procedural prescription with the individual excuses, vulnerabilities and life situations of users, shows that there is a gap between institutional work as designed and institutional work as implemented. The findings show that much

effort must be dedicated to coordinate activities on the frontline with the administrative logic. Here, the administrative logic meets interactional requirements of frontline practice and specific occupational norms (all frontline agents have a training background in education and social work) that one could call a “logic of care” (Mol 2008, cited in Björk 2013). While the administrative logic “wants the professionals to follow pre-established courses of action, [...] the logic of care emphasizes the need for adjustment and “tinkering” in clinical practice” (Björk 2013: 182-183). The simultaneous existence of these two logics puts the frontline agents in a situation where a lot of invisible “articulation work” (Straus 1985) is required, work “work that gets things back ‘on track’ in the face of the unexpected and modifies action to accommodate unanticipated contingencies” (Star/Strauss 1999: 10). The findings have shown that without this kind of work, the SeMo would hardly be able to – on the one side – maintain its exchange relations with the public employment service while – on the other side – do “appropriate” work through accommodating for the individual users and their respective life-world.

As has been described above, the sociology of conventions provides an appropriate vocabulary for analyzing how frontline agents deal with the gap between different institutional logics, a gap that results from the different principles of action of a pluralist institutional environment. Breviglieri and Stavo-Debaug provide a highly concise description of the invisible work of reconciling these gaps: In order to reconcile this gap, social workers often have to partly free themselves from the conventional demands at the level of the organization, and in some sense pass “below the conventions” (Breviglieri/Stavo-Debaug 2006: 129). The register of proximity, disengaged from any judgment and test, allows the exhibition of the user’s own self without being at risk of being judged right away, and “where the principle of confidentiality suppresses the possibility that confessions made have a negative impact as suspended from any judgment, sometimes allowing to the users to regain confidence and preventing them from dropping out of the social facility” (Breviglieri et. al 2003: 147). Thévenot (2008) describes the work of social workers as an “art of composition”. This terminology describes that the “the most delicate, trying and skillful aspect of their (social workers) work consist [...] which implies to integrate these different engagements while preventing the tyranny of one of them and the oppressions on another” (Thévenot 2008: 20). For Thévenot, social work implies the composition of different regimes of engagement, “from the familiar confidence and attachments that have to be maintained, to the engagement in a plan supporting projects, to the public requirement of qualification tests following different orders of worth (market, industrial, civic)” (Thévenot 2008: 20). Just like in the example described above, frontline agents “have the duty to enforce regulations and standards and refer to legal officers in case of infringement” (ibid.) and are as such bound to specific conventionalized schemes of interpretation of the situation in which the persons are assessed in the regime of justification, on the other

side they are practically required to consider the close attachments of persons and build confidence relationships that allow them to do their work. The “coordination work” that is entailed in this description shows that the SeMo requires considerable discretion of frontline agents to function at all. This coordination work, invisible in rationalized models of institutional work, is a precarious pre-condition for the policy to function at all.

### **7.2.5. Risks and Limits of Institutionalised Individualism: “Autonomy Gaps” in Welfare Policies**

As my research has shown, developed welfare states tend to “mainstream the functioning of service institutions towards a life-course model one can call marketable biography” (Levy/Bühlmann 2016: 30). Based on individualized autonomy and employability, active welfare policies tend to conceive of individual actors as omnicompetent managers of their life courses. Chapters 2 and 3 of this study have shown that this coincides with the functional differentiation of society and that is streamlined with an increasing “biographisation” (Kohli 1985) and with the emergence of new forms of governing persons. Chapter 6 has shown that the norm of individual autonomy plays a central role in the people processing activities of the SeMo. As described in chapter 6.5. and 6.6, young persons are addressed as individual biographical choosers and professional futures are displayed as outcome of an individual process of choice. For instance, the demand of the portfolio to write down three “dream jobs” deliberately abstracts from and ignores both the strict regulation of the occupation-education link of the Swiss apprenticeship system on the one side but also ignores possible internal limitations, for instance the self-elimination of lower-class youth from specific, more demanding apprenticeships. Such practices aim at fostering self-exploration of the service user who is asked to put himself into a specific, planificatory-projective relationship towards himself. These processes operate from the background of an unquestioned norm of institutionalized individualism. It is this norm that potentially produces an intense and continuous self-scrutiny, self-dissatisfaction and self-evaluation. The focus on individuality serves as a guiding norm that urges “to discover who we really are, to realize our potentials and shape our lifestyles, we become tied to the project of our own identity and bound in new ways into the pedagogies of expertise” (Rose 1998: 93). In this short subchapter, I will try to explore the risks and limits of this institutionalized norm of autonomy. In the late nineties, the sociology of youth intensely discussed questions related to institutionalized individualism in its reception of Beck’s individualization thesis. The discussion pretty much evolved around the question of how far the “choice biography”-argument holds and what implications resulted from it. For Heinz, stressing this “agentic” side of transitions may “very well create wrong messages to policymakers about the action potential of young women and

men, as producers of their biography who can be made responsible for not putting their agentic capacity to work” (Heinz 2009: 397). Young people may be firmly inscribed in the discourse of having the opportunity to be the “author” of their personal lifestyle and life-course. However, they are also regarded as responsible for the failures and successes that result from the choices they make (Furlong/Carmel 2007, Du Bois-Reymond 1995). Young people seem to be confronted with the societal norm of self-realization through work while at the same time the possibilities for self-realization are not accessible to them. The societal norm of an agentic, self-reflexive, choosing subject can, in this case, become an abominable exigence as most young people are not in any condition to choose their “job”. In these conditions, the norm of institutionalized individualism can have potentially problematic effects: Asking the most destitute young people to develop individual professional projects is asking them to transform their fate into choice.

After all, the question of how young people subjectively deal with institutionalized individualism is an empirical question. While I collected interview data of young users of the SeMo for the present study, I decided halfway of the research process not to analyze that data more intensely. Nevertheless, I would like to take this conclusion as an occasion to give a short insight into that data in order to put light on the different ways young people position themselves towards the norm of institutionalized individualism. These range from a symbolic rehabilitation through adherence to the norm to an ambivalent resistance to it. Based on Hirschman's typology of “exit, voice and loyalty” (1970), one can typologize the reaction of young persons to the identity frameworks of the institution. For some, the option of “loyalty” to the normative discursive resources of the institution allows a kind of symbolic rehabilitation. On the one side, their positioning practices in the interviews were less driven by the goal to overcome their marginal position on the labor market, rather than to maintain a stable identity when confronted with the stigma of inactivity. The use of the institutional vocabulary of motives about subjective self-mobilization, the interiorization of institutional demands (“I have to motivate myself”) and the submission to the identity frameworks of the institution seemed to guarantee a minimum of self-esteem and respectability. On the other side, it increases dependency on the institution for maintaining a satisfying self-construction: “loyalty” often goes hand in hand with a moral boundary drawing towards other beneficiaries, and with an adherence to a norm that supports their own degradation. As one young person describes, “*Me, I do not see me in their situation, I worked a lot in school in order to go further, while them, they did not care about their grades, they choose to have the job they have now*” (John: 296-302). The compliance with the norm of institutionalized individualism, according to which everyone gets what they deserve based on their own merits, allows to describe oneself as a “meriting beneficiary” and to maintain a sense of self-worth and respectability. The strategy of “exit” describes a form of resistance to the identity frameworks of the institu-

tion. This goes hand in hand with the rejection of a self-conception based on work and entails processes of non-conformity and of subjective disengagement. This can lead to processes of self-identification with the pejorative labels of “bad student” or “scrounger”: *“because the SeMo, it is for scroungers, you rarely find persons who where just unlucky and have some problems to find a job but who want to work. You mostly find persons like me, who do not really want to work”* (James: 303-305). This self-attribution of failure and personalization of structural inequalities also follows the logic of institutionalized individualism: if access to social positions is allegedly guided by individual effort and initiative only, only the individual can be blamed for his failure. The individualist bias enshrined in the idea of the autonomous, contractual view of the subject attributing responsibility for one’s own fate leads to the fact that failure can only be linked to the incapacities of the individual, who rates themselves as not good enough or not competitive enough. The tragedy of this conception is that subjects reclaim their status as autonomous beings, even accepting the shame of not complying with the imperative of autonomy, rather than renouncing to it and feeling like a victim. The gap between the conception of welfare beneficiaries as utility-maximizing bargain hunters and the empirical, individual reasons for action becomes apparent in the case of Daniel, whose career choices seem to operate between “not aiming too high” (in order to keep the plan realizable) and not aiming “too low”, (in order that it is still possible to identify with his job choice). His reluctance to do any job possible does not derive from the weak monetary returns attached to it but from the willingness to avoid becoming a kind of person that is neither valued by himself nor recognized by society: *“Yes... I know many folks who did nothing and who turned the wrong way afterward [...] I was really scared to become one of those street guys, just hanging around”* (Daniel: 561-564). Job search activities, and the fragile, but loyal relation he maintains with the world of work is driven by his attempts to restore a sense of self-value and dignity in the face of jobs that are unpromising in terms of social recognition. The alleged “unwillingness” to enter the workforce derives partly from the social status attached to the jobs he can rationally expect. The institutional classification within the lower school grades here acts as a stigma, which enters into the self-descriptions, self-interpretations, and action-strategies of actors. But it does not only come with an implicit judgment on the social value of individuals, but also opens, restricts and structures their agency. While Daniel interiorizes the implicit scale of value of different jobs, he also sees himself as not “good enough” for most of the pathways. On the other side, he displays a low commitment to future occupational selves with low social status (neither valued by oneself nor by others). His categorization as a “weak pupil” thus leads him to a self-elimination from more prestigious apprenticeship places. As Jenkins describes: careers are “as much the products of categorizations as of self-identification and self-determination” (Jenkin, 2002: 12). This is reflected in different quotes in which the interviewed young person draws back on the institu-

tionally provided knowledge, which both restricts and enables their expectations. The discursive construction of their identity in institutional frameworks amounts to finding a recognized self-definition that is “satisfying” to him, and at the same time validated by the institutions who anchor and frame it through categorization. This short glance on the way individuals deal with the injunction of institutionalized individualism stands in sharp contrast to the conception of the individual in unemployment insurance. The sanctioning procedure described in chapter 6.2.1 makes only sense from the background of the idea that youngsters generally can comply with the work requirements and specific behavioral imperatives and that participants calculate the cost and benefits of non-compliance with the rules. These few results show that there exists a gap between such a conception of the welfare subject and the empirical reasons for action of situated subjects. As Dubet and Veretout describe, “effectively, actors do not play on the basis of their interests, they play their skin, the image they have of themselves, their identities, and based on conflicts between their self-image and the image that is attributed to them” (Dubet/Veretout 2001: 410, own translation). The conception of the welfare subject in the unemployment insurance presumes an instrumental-rational individual, in which both job preferences and aspirations derive from individuality herself and who is independently capable of action. This is – as the manifold informal client categories show – obviously not the case (see e.g. Dahmen 2014). Much more, the abstract liberal political subject, – before gaining its status as an “autonomous being” – needs to find a hold in relationships of recognition and supportive relationships in the close, familiar sphere. The “morally responsible self” that is presupposed in the liberal conception of the person is dependent on relations of intersubjective recognition, (Anderson/Honneth 2005: 127) as a constitutive precondition for the ability to pursue own life projects. The “capacity to act”, or a sense of “biographical agency” – so generously presumed in the notion of the “individualized integration project” is only possible from the background of “a view of oneself as the legitimate source of reasons for acting” (Anderson/Honneth 2005: 146). The short description of the way young welfare beneficiaries deal with the injunction of autonomy can be described as “autonomy gap” (Anderson 2008: 1), a gap between the “patterns of decision-making failures in terms of a discrepancy between the capacities for choice that are presupposed by public policies, institutional arrangements, and social practices and the capacities that people actually have or will develop” (Anderson 2008: 9). The institutionalized individualism of the SeMo, addressing young unemployed as free-floating, autonomous choosers and designers of their own life-course stands in a harsh contrast to their social vulnerability, the necessarily temporary nature of professional choices at a relatively early age and the absence of the structural requirements (a sufficient amount of options that young persons have reason to value) for such choices. The concept of autonomy gaps thereby highlights that the lack of decision-making capacities of young persons is not a deficiency



to be attributed to the young people (in times of multi-optional, inherently insecure transitions and low prospects of success, it might be quite reasonable not to “choose” and to trust the promises of institutionalized actors). Much more, the decision-making patterns are “problematic only against the background of a contingent level of demandingness of social tasks” (Anderson 2008: 10). A solution would then – besides the provision of the structural, recognitional and relational features required for “choices” - lie in “redesigning choice architecture to make it more doable for more people” (Anderson 2008: 11).

### 7.2.6. Subjectivation Practices Between Subjection and Enablement

The institutional program of the Motivational Semester certainly entails a strict control dimension when it comes to the immanent selection function and the normative framing of acceptable, realizable and non-realizable job choices. It also serves as a kind of government as it attempts to orient the behavior of its participants. While the impact on the participants certainly is a kind of surveillance, of control and of disciplinary action, it would be simplistic to analyze the people processing and people changing activities without relating it to the values and legitimations according to whom the institution legitimizes its controlling power. In the case of the Motivational Semester, institutional activities are – at least in principle – gearing towards shaping new capacities and dispositions that will produce accomplished and “accepted” adulthood. While the Motivational Semester surely is oriented towards the “entrepreneurial self” (Bröckling 2016) as a specific hegemonic figure of the subject, it would be objectionable to presuppose a straight top-down appropriation of this figure by young people and welfare professionals alike. This would constitute a “shortcut from program to praxis” (Van Dyk/Lessenisch et al. 2013: 97) that governmentality studies (or at least some branches of them) can be criticized for due to their pure focus on the genealogy of specific discursive formations. For this reason, this research study proposed to analyze “subjectivation” in situ, “in action” – through an in-depth analysis of the people processing and people changing work accomplished by the frontline workers. A perspective that focusses on the analysis of practices provides the analytical vocabulary for describing the ambivalences of subjectivation between enablement and subjection. As Alkemeyer et al. describe, “in addition to discourse analytical perspectives, analyzing subjectivation as a process of enablement in praxis implies that it does not only depend on discursive formation but always takes shape in situated performances of practices” (Alkemeyer/Buschmann 2017: 21). It is only through a practice-oriented perspective that one becomes able to describe that the powerful forms of subjectivation might also offer specific forms re-appropriation and enable specific forms of agency. The knowledge categories and cognitive categories used by welfare professionals have both an objectifying and a subjectivating character – on the

one side they shape the young persons as institutionally recognizable subjects (for instance as a person having not enough skills to enter a certain apprenticeship). On the other side, young persons learn to act as “subjects” through “subjecting” and reorganizing themselves in this discursive vocabulary. Nevertheless, it is only through switching the perspective from an analysis of the discursively provided templates for self-construction (e.g. the idea of an individualized, autonomous biographical chooser) towards the practical-interactive enactment of these norms that their subtle effects come to light. Actors (both youngsters and welfare professionals) are not merely “symbolic fools” that simply adopt these templates for self-construction, but they are – as described in chapter four – disposing of a “critical capacity” (Boltanski/Thévenot 1999) to judge the situated and normative appropriateness of specific practical norms (or in the words of Boltanski and Thévenot, of different moral grammars). At this point the sociology of conventions and practice-theoretical accounts of social reality seem to develop a concordant perspective. The “methodological situationism” (Diaz-Bone 2017: 85) of the economy of conventions, its conception of situations of coordination as inherently insecure, the emphasis put on the uncertainty of each participant of practices regarding the identification of the situation as well as the interpretative effort required to define a situation as a “common” situation (see e.g. Wagner 1993: 466) sensitize for the fact that subjectivation should not be conceived as a process of top-down acceptance of discursively embedded norms, but as an ambiguous and open-ended process that deserves to be analyzed in its own right. In line with the central place of “the situation” in the sociology of conventions, practice-theoretical perspectives of subjectivation highlight that “the acquisition of play-ability and agency happens in a mesh of heterogenous practices and always involves the acceptance and embodiment of practical norms. It is only by adopting norms in praxis that subjectivity emerges that is recognized” (Alkemeyer/Buschmann 2017: 21). Where practice theory speaks of “practical norms of recognizability” (Reh/Ricken 2012), the sociology of conventions speaks of “moral grammars” or “orders of worth” (Boltanski/Thévenot 2006) in which persons can be recognized as “great” or “small”, in which they can be “valorized” or “devalorised” (Remillion/Eymard-Duvernay 2012: 112). Paul Ricoeur has repeatedly highlighted the similarities between Honneth’s theory of social recognition and the sociology of conventions, to describing conventions as “orders of recognition” (Ricoeur 2005: 204). To evaluate the “greatness” and the “worth” of an individual in the light of contested conventions inevitably involves a form of social recognition. Through providing a specific discursive vocabulary, young persons are potentially provided with a specific “vocabulary of motives” (Mills 1940) that makes them intelligible and recognizable within larger public frameworks. As has been shown in chapter 6.3, the mobilization of different conventions of valuation allows the young persons to become “intelligible” and “recognizable” within the conventional tests of the labor market. Subjectivation then may mean that young people learn to re-de-

scribe themselves within the “norms of recognizability and linguistic positioning” (Reh/Ricken 2012) that resonate within the social world of work. Youngsters’ struggles for recognition (or in the words of the sociology of conventions, for “greatness”) in the conventional tests of the labor market surely is a form of agency, but a vulnerable, situated form of agency as the struggle for “greatness” or “smallness” is always at the risk of failing recognition. The possibility of recognition implies the possibility of misrecognition, the potentiality of becoming an “intelligible” subject involves the possibility of “smallness”, failure and contempt. Such a perspective requires a conception of the subject and of the concept of agency that does not fall into the trap of conceptualizing young people as mere cultural dopes, neither should they be seen as unambiguously reflexive, autonomous beings. As the analysis of subjectivation practices has shown, the epistemic matrix that is performatively enacted in the tests, assessments, and interactions does guide towards the construction of a specific (self-reflexive, autonomous, self-sufficient, choosing) subject. Nevertheless, it is too hasty to presume an undifferentiated acquisition of these knowledge frames and orders of recognition through the subjects. It seems much more appropriate to expect that the young people themselves integrate this epistemic matrix in their self-descriptions and that they rely on the proposed knowledge categories and frames for self-construction. This is in line with the theory of “narrative selves” (Christman 2009) that tries to account for the symbolic matrix in which processes of self-constitution take place as well as or the reflexive aspects of self-actualization. As John Christman puts it “When an individual reflects on her personal characteristics, actions, memories, and the like, she must use concepts gleaned from the language(s) s/he speaks and the subtleties of meaning provided by the social world within which that language is developed” (Christman 2009: 84). Self-interpretation is thus inevitably bound to the socio-cultural world and the semantic resources people have at their disposal.

This has serious implications for the conceptualization of biographical transitions: Instead of criticizing the concept of biography as a mere “illusion” (Bourdieu 1986), as a contrafactual representation of life as a coherent totality that disregards the “social trajectory” of a person, actors have to be conceived as disposing of a “critical capacity” (Boltanski/Thévenot 1999). They practically engage with the symbolic order that is enshrined in the different “practical tests” in the confrontation with the symbolic order and practical norms of recognizability when transitioning from school to work. In this perspective, biographies are the sedimentation of a series of “reality tests” (Boltanski/Thévenot 2006: 142) in which persons are confronted with practically dealing with being evaluated as “small” or “big”, “great” or “small” according to the criteria of greatness in use in a given segment of the social structure. Similar to the concept of subjectivation in Foucault-inspired governmentality studies, such an approach departs from the idea of a pre-given autonomous social subjectivity and focusses on the social processes through which people become

recognized as subjects. In addition to this concept of subjectivation, the economy of conventions provides the analytical tools to describe how these social processes take place in concrete situations and interactions. It is in this process that “agency” – as a form of recognition as a “competent co-player” (Alkemeyer/Buschmann 2017: 21) emerges. By adjusting their style of acting to the normative expectations that reign in a shared practice (for instance the practice of the “being an apprentice” or the practice of “doing a job interview”), by learning the appropriate vocabulary of motives for specific situations, and by incorporating the evaluative vocabulary of the labor-market into their own self-descriptions) they become recognized as “competent actors” in a new interaction field. As shown in chapter 6.4.5. the creation of a positive narrative on the extra-curricular activities of a young person amounts to a public situation of rehearsal in which the person learns to put oneself into a reflexive stance towards own characteristics and capacities and to judge oneself from the norms of evaluation that reign in these fields. But, as the sociology of conventions shows, actors are not unilaterally subjectivated by the criteria of greatness. Due to the inherent insecurity on the appropriateness of these criteria of evaluation for the situation at stake, persons are equipped with the critical capacity to judge the system of values, to denounce, to criticize and appropriate the conventionalized frameworks. As Ricoeur puts it: “these enable individual agents to develop a new capability: that of judging the system of values prevailing in the limited world where a place is assigned to him or her. A new dimension of the person is revealed in that way, in connection with the capability to understand another world than his/her own. This capability may be compared to that of learning a foreign language and of translating a message from one language into another” (Ricoeur 2006: 25).



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## 9. Annex

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### Acronyms and Abbreviations

- ALMP** Active labor market policies
- AOMAS** Swiss association of labor market policies organizers
- CDAS/SODK** Conference of cantonal directors for social affairs
- CDEP/VDK** Conference of cantonal directors for economic affairs
- CDIP/EDK** Conference of cantonal directors for educational affairs
- CMBB/CMFP** Case management for vocational training
- CSIAS/SKOS** Conference of cantonal institutions of social assistance Inter-cantonal
- CSFP** Conference of vocational training services Inter-cantonal
- HSO** Human Service Organisation
- LACI/AVIG** Law for unemployment-insurance and insolvency compensation Federal
- LIPA** Initiative on the adequate supply of apprenticeship places Federal
- OFAS/BSV** Federal office for social insurances Federal
- OFS** Federal office of statistics Federal
- OoW** Orders of Worth
- OFFT/BBT** (see SEFRI) Federal office for training and technology
- ORP** Regional employment services, Public employment service
- SBBK** the Swiss conference of cantonal offices for VET
- SECO** State secretariat for economic affairs
- SEFRI** (former OFFT) State secretariat for training, research, and innovation
- SeMo** motivation semester
- SGB** Swiss federation of trade unions
- SGV/USAM** Umbrella organization of Swiss small and medium enterprises
- SLB** Street-Level Bureaucrats
- PES** Public employment service
- VET** Vocational Education and Training

## List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Own Representation of Action Regimes in the Sociology of Conventions based on Thévenot (2001).....	140
Tab 1: Own Representation of the Orders of Worth Framework based on Boltanski and Thévenot 2009: 159-203).....	142
Tab 2: Conventional orders of Worth – Example Taken from Thévenot (2002: 184).....	143
Figure 2: Table of faults and sanctions.....	194
Figure 3 and 4: Portfolio Tool: “Progress Chart” (left) and “Checklist” (right) .....	242
Figure 5: Portfolio Tool: “Standardized Assessment Instrument” .....	247

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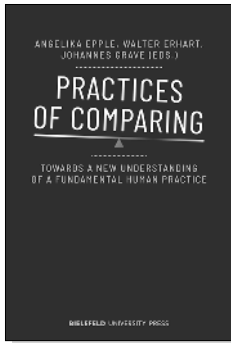
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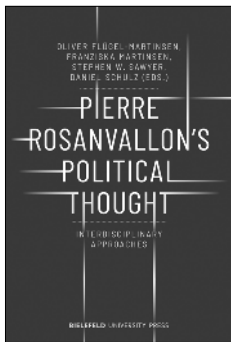
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