



## **Approaching Migrant Youth Marginalization through the Capabilities Approach: Methodological Proposals**

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### **1 Introduction**

Adopting the capabilities approach and the terminology that has been respectively developed, we could assume that Amartya Sen's "capabilities" consist in the actual living that people manage to achieve ("functionings") as a result of actual free will. Sen's freedom does not "only [depend on the] mere degree of the presence or absence of coercion or interference (from others)" (Otto and Ziegler 2006) but also on "the range of options a person has in deciding what kind of life to lead" (Dreze and Sen 1995, 10).

In his book, *Identity and Violence*, Sen, without explicitly connecting the capabilities approach with his views on "genuine multiculturalism"<sup>1</sup> (Sen 2007), in fact, introduces this extended conception of freedom in the way we examine identity matters. Since freedom becomes perceptible as the range of options a person has, concerning the kind of life he wishes to live, cultural freedom can be defined through the concept of the multiplicity of belonging. In other words, cultural freedom constitutes itself a capability, which is realized when nothing and no one, not even myself, can tie me down to a kind of cultural rigidity that tends to exclude and marginalize me. This latent connection of "capabilities" with "multiple identities" (Sen 2007) challenges us to search for the contribution Sen's approach could have in the understanding and confrontation of issues concerning migrants, away from theoretical patterns that overemphasize the cultural otherness as an impediment to inclusion. Besides, Sen himself, without of course focusing exclusively on migrants, has already approached the matter of social exclusion with terms of his capabilities approach (Sen 2000).

### **2 Methodological proposals for the application of capabilities approach**

It is already known that the capabilities approach can be used as an evaluative framework of social policies as it provides the appropriate tools for the measuring of people's well-being. From such attempts arise lists of basic capabilities, which are sensitive to cultural contexts and as such are really useful to anyone who tries to analyze social issues. Nevertheless, according to critiques, a real promising theory cannot be limited to evaluation but, on the contrary, it must be in the position to be applicable on the intervention level (Alkire 2007). These critiques must undoubtedly be handled with exceptional attention by the professionals. But, in order to reach the phase of intervention, we first ought to know in which level and for which reasons capabilities frustration take place. In other words, in order to find how to face

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<sup>1</sup> According to Sen, genuine multiculturalism is only the cultural plurality, which arises from real cultural freedom, i.e. from someone's capability to maintain or change his preferences concerning his cultural identity (Sen 2007, 174). This definition is directly linked with the idea that there are multiple categories of belonging. Persons have got more than one identities, to which they are not passively exposed - each time they reexamine the functionality and the value that those have in their lives (Baros and Manafi 2008, 320).

the factors that impede the realization of capabilities, we first ought to have confined and understood in deep, which specific factors we have to eliminate.

In Sen's approach, equality among persons does not identify with the equality of "primary goods" (Rawls 1971) that they enjoy. This happens because the real freedoms that people have to exploit these goods may be objectively constrained by other factors (Dean et al. 2004, 4-5). So capabilities are nothing more than opportunities ("capability inputs"), which have been successfully "converted" into particular forms of action (c.f. Robeyns 2005). However, in order to achieve such a conversion, it is indispensably presupposed that there are no restrictive factors, which tie persons down to "adaptive preferences"<sup>2</sup> (Sen 1999), compulsory choices and generally a kind of life they do not "have reason to choose and value" (Otto and Ziegler 2006). Robeyns categorized these factors to a) personal, b) sociostructural and cultural and c) institutional (Robeyns 2005). This attempt is actually a step forward to the enlightenment of the conditions that obstruct the conversion process mentioned above. Nonetheless, it sustains the following weakness: in terms of terminology, at least, it does not sufficiently reveal the complex network of interactions between persons and society (Baros and Manafi 2008, 322). Without refusing completely personal responsibility, we argue that even those factors, which Robeyns characterizes as personal, are not independent of social conditions. As Ruth Levitas puts it: Capabilities "are always socially produced [...] are social in their origin as well as their development [...] subject to social determination at every stage" (Levitas 2004, 616).

There is no doubt that all social welfare systems, even in the robust European countries, have still got a long way to cover. Nevertheless, judging from the Greek example, we could say that even when real opportunities occur, usually, a small number of the addressees make use of it. Concerning Greece, the examples of the Roma and the Muslim minority of Thrace are typical, even not the only ones. These people often ignore opportunities mainly related to education. In this case it is easy for us to overemphasize their cultural difference and present it as the exclusive obstacle of their progress and prosperity. There are undoubtedly cultural norms, which are powerful enough to constrain and oppress people<sup>3</sup>. However the impression that such a thing concerns exclusively minorities is just an illusion. Such interpretations could be considered as oversimplifying and insufficient to lead to effective social interventions. They ignore people's multiple identities, they overemphasize the significance of the term "culture" in the interpretation of human action<sup>4</sup>, they responsabilize persons themselves and they actually present cultural assimilation<sup>5</sup> as the only way out. Methodologically, it would be much more effective to approach social issues through the examination of the relations

<sup>2</sup> Adaptive preferences (Sen 1999) are formed when chances of success or failure are internalized, transformed into individual aspirations or expectations and then externalized in action (Swartz 2000, 103). In other words, adaptive preferences are preferences adapted in deprivation (Otto and Ziegler 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Unterhalter gives some great examples that refer to women's education, see Unterhalter 2003, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Human action cannot be adequately explained correlating cultural meanings with their subjective interpretations. Even if we define the meaning of "culture" and "cultural differences" dynamically, i.e. as an intermediate level between individual and society and as socially produced potences of action respectively, we cannot explain the subjects' actions sufficiently. Which of the existing potences the subject will choose for the formation of his action, is not simply accessible through cultural meanings (Holzkamp 1996).

<sup>5</sup> The basic idea of the neo-assimilation model is that the most important precondition for the successful integration and improvement of migrants' lives in the host country is their "structural assimilation", i.e. the acquisition of those qualifications required for their integration in the labour market. For the "structural assimilation" to be achieved, "cultural assimilation" must have taken place first. Cultural assimilation refers to the adoption of the basic cultural features of the host country (language mainly) (Brubaker 2001; Alba and Nee 1999; Esser 2003).

developed among social structures, subjective grounds of action and the intentions of action that subjects form (Baros 2006).

In this direction, a systematization of the factors that obstruct opportunities conversion into real capabilities would be useful. What follows is a classification of these restraining factors into four different levels. We would like to underline that many of them are often the result of already frustrated capabilities (table 1).

Table 1: Levels where obstruction of the conversion process can take place

<b>Opportunities for the realization of desirable aims</b> Free Greek language learning programme for working migrants (certificate acquisition)		
<b>Knowledge / Awareness</b>	The person does not know the existence of specific opportunities (access to information) <sup>6</sup> / is not aware that they concern him - that they are really appropriate for him.	I have not heard about the programme / I believe that even the acquisition of such a certificate will not help me develop my professional status (adaptive preference).
<b>Means</b>	Absence of already realized capabilities, which serve in the realization of others (instrumental role of capabilities <sup>7</sup> ).	I have been unemployed for five months – I do not belong to any working migrants' category.

<sup>6</sup> Researches reveal that “many new migrants are simply not aware of the kinds of services available for them” (European Commission Research 2003, 36). According to a European survey conducted by “Doctors of the World” in 2006 on undocumented migrants’ access to health care, the most frequent obstacle to access treatment is the unawareness of this right (15, 6%). The fear of being reported reaches 11, 7%, whereas the language barrier reaches 11, 1% (Chauvin and Parizot et al. 2007, 56).

<sup>7</sup> Capabilities have two dimensions: they have both instrumental and intrinsic value, i.e. they are both means and ends at the same time. Education, for example, is indeed necessary to gain access to the labour market but it is also good in itself because by widening individual’s mind, even if this does not contribute to acquiring material goods, it offers him a more fulfilling life (c.f. Unterhalter 2003, 8).

<b>External factors</b>	Under power asymmetry conditions the potential development of the person is constrained. <sup>8</sup>	I am an undocumented (not insured) worker – I cannot prove that I belong to the working migrants' category.
<b>Aims of action</b>	Experiencing dilemma circumstances that arise from priority conflicts, the person rejects a specific opportunity as of secondary significance for him.	I am offered a quite better (financially) job but the unstable working hours are not compatible with my participation in the programme. I prefer to “sacrifice” my participation in the programme

In a previous paper (Baros and Manafi 2008), we had referred to an empirical example from Germany: A German bank offered places of professional apprenticeship. Ailin, Selma and Güldene who were interested in such positions were in front of an opportunity. Ailin was informed about the opportunity and responded immediately. Selma did not know about it and Güldene, although she had heard about it, did not try at all, believing that she had no chances of success. The process to the realization of the capability had already ended for Selma and Güldene from the very first level. Ailin continued the process having all the qualifications required for the specific position (i.e. means – second level): a high school certificate with high grades as well as a certificate in English. As for Selma, even if she had not been obstructed in the first level, she would have “failed” in the second one because she had not graduated high school. Güldene, on the other hand, would have continued the process as she had the same qualifications with Ailin, who unlike Gülden, had never faced racist attitudes and discriminatory treatment (third level). Nevertheless Ailin didn't finally reach the capability realization, either. Having internalized social expectations concerning gender, she had to choose between two aims, which she experienced as not compatible, marriage and professional career. Finally, she handled her internal conflict by choosing to create a family. For Ailin the process ended in the fourth level.

It is obvious that such a methodological tool enables us to reveal all the range of the restraining factors, without isolating them from their social context. It enables us to reveal the complex interconnections among levels and among factors allowing a systematic examination of the ways external/objective conditions and meanings are converted into subjective grounds of human action (Kempf 1992; Baros and Retz 2002). In other words, placed in the wider

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<sup>8</sup> This refers to Johan Galtung's theory of violence. Galtung underlined the existence of indirect forms of violence, which are embedded in the structures of economic, political and social systems (“structured violence”). Structured violence is reflected in all forms of social inequality, which occurs under conditions of asymmetric power distribution. Unlike direct violence, which is easily noticeable, structured violence is hidden deep in the structures of systems and usually tends to be perceived as normality. Of course, “cultural violence” also contributes to this. Cultural violence consists in all those aspects of culture (religion, ideology, art, language, science), which appropriately used, are able to legitimize all forms of structured or even direct violence (Galtung 1975, 1990).

methodological framework of social constructivism (Kempf 2008a, 2008b) and supported by other theories as well, like the social practice theory (Bourdieu 1984), the theory of violence (Galtung 1975, 1998), the theory of alienation (Sève 1978) and critical psychology (Holzkamp 1991) too, this methodological tool, allows a dynamic application of the capabilities approach.

### **3 Approaching migrant youth social exclusion and marginalization through the proposed methodological framework**

We could say that social inclusion, seen from the capabilities approach perspective, constitutes a multidimensional capability, whose realization depends exclusively on the realization of other capabilities (access to health care services, housing, education, employment, etc.). This means that its deprivation, which is nothing more than social exclusion, is always the result of a frustration that takes place exclusively in the second level (means – capabilities with their instrumental role) as long as policies of “active exclusion” are not applied. By saying active exclusion policies, Sen means, those policies, which deprive opportunities and aim directly at the exclusion of specific social groups from public and social goods (Sen 2000, 15).

As concerns younger migrants, those of the second generation, researches have shown that although they have more opportunities than their parents had, they continue to come up against situations that obstruct the conversion of these opportunities to real capabilities (Chamberlayne et al. 1999, 61). Although younger migrants reach higher educational and occupational levels than their parents (Heckmann et al. 2001, 15), they often lack vocational education and sustain high unemployment percentages - much higher than those of native youngsters<sup>9</sup> (Heckmann et al. 2001, 12). “Despite being more integrated than their parents<sup>10</sup>, as evidence by linguistic competence for example, children still face exclusion. Most still identify with their parents’ country” (European Commission Research 2003, 44).

This, of course, allows us to doubt the main aspect of the neo-assimilation model that the acquisition of the language is the most important condition for migrants’ successful integration into the host society. That is actually what we observe in the example of the above table. Exclusion has taken place one step before the frustration of the particular capability (language acquisition). Exclusion took place when the migrant was not actually excluded from the labour market but was included into it under unfavourable and undesirable conditions<sup>11</sup> (e.g. undocumented – uninsured work).

Let us examine a restraining factor from the above table through the methodological framework we suggest. Undocumented (uninsured) work is the result of a retreat due to power asymmetry. However both the employer (who imposes it) and the employee (who accepts it) choose an inappropriate way to handle precarity. The employer, possibly subject to precarious conditions himself, looks for an employee without being willing to provide him insurance coverage. On the other hand, the unemployed migrant pursues a job that will offer him and his family all health care services, pension prerequisites and all the other benefits law provides. The interests of both parts result in a “destructive conflict” (competitive way to handle problems - each part pursues to impose his aims by detrimenting the other part’s interests)

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<sup>9</sup> For the results of researches that took place between the years 1992-2001 see European Commission Research 2003, 35.

<sup>10</sup> See Bracalenti’s research, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> For the distinction between exclusion and “unfavourable inclusion” see Sen 2000, 28.

(Deutsch 1976) as no one can reach the desired aim - their aims remain unrealized. Soon, procedures for the formation of adaptive preferences and compulsory choices are activated and the migrant gives in to the employer's "aggressiveness" redefining his aims.<sup>12</sup> He merely seeks to assure an income sacrificing even the substantial right of insurance<sup>13</sup> – "restrictive action potency" (Holzkamp 1983).

From the standpoint of each part, the chosen form of action seems reasonable, but indeed is not the appropriate one. In the long term, it will lead to further conflicts creating a vicious circle of continuous and escalating precarization. The native employer harms the economy to which he is also subject himself and contributes to the deterioration of native labour's working conditions (trying to be competitive they compromise, too, often developing racist attitudes). The uninsured migrant employee, on the other hand, does not gain access to health care services, risks future goods (retirement) and contributes himself to his identification with specific unfavourable terms. He plays a part to the deterioration of working condition and is stigmatized as the only responsible for unemployment, low salaries, uninsured work etc<sup>14</sup>. It is obvious that both parts become gears of their own precarization. Unintentionally, they perpetuate their problems (Sève1978), setting at the same time the basis for further conflicts – the subjective reason of action is not compatible with the objective reason of action.

The analysis of this example obviously confirms Sen's view on the dynamics of the capabilities approach: "While the individual is seen as the person to whom relational deprivation occurs [...], the focus of capability analysis [...] has been very sensitive to the social causes of individual deprivation". The causal factors of capabilities deprivation are according to Sen inescapably social (Sen 2000, 8).

The capabilities approach is an "educational approach to justice" (Otto 2008, 489). Its strength as concerns migration research and Intercultural Pedagogy (Baros and Otto 2008; Baros 2008) consists in the fact that it allows us to study systematically –outpacing mere infertile rhetoric about equal distribution of chances – all restraining factors that obstruct migrants' social inclusion and well being facilitating at the same time focused pedagogical intervention in the direction of individual's capacitation.

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<sup>12</sup> According to studies "social exclusion seems to be a typical condition for migrants and one that is often taken for granted. [...] They are seen as second-class citizens and immigrants see this as their lot (Cremer-Schäfer 2001, 69-70).

<sup>13</sup> This is exactly what constitutes precarious employment, the sub-standard employment. (Navarro et al. 2005, 41). As the subject of the present paper is not precarity, for more information see indicatively Castro Varela 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Researches show that migrants "have typically been the scapegoats for existing or perceived social and economic problems ranging from unemployment to criminality. For example, the Euro barometer reported in 1997 that 63 % of those interviewed believed that the presence of minority groups had increased unemployment". It is not occasional that "the majority tend to change their views with the ups and downs of the economy" (United Nations Survey 2004, 162-163).

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