

(UNMET)NEEDS: A CHALLENGING CONCEPT AND A COMPLEX SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

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Abstract

This paper is based on an investigation entitled "Unmet Needs in Portugal - Tradition and emerging trends". Among other objectives, the study in question sought to develop an operative notion of needs, interpreting them as generated by the non-achievement of individual aspirations / expectations, through mismatch between opportunities and capabilities, in a dynamic process between the social context of action and the individual. Of the six case studies conducted within the scope of the research, we extracted the analysis of how two of those groups (adults in transition to retirement and adults in training transition) face the complex relationship that involves the satisfaction of their needs. We chose the first group because it allows us to analyse how these (older) adults live an important period of transition and the consequent recomposition of their needs that this stage of life (the transition to retirement) entails. In the case of adults in training transition, we use the testimonies of this group as an aid to understand how learning processes (at least, formal ones) interfere with the questioning, perception and achievement of the unmet needs. Therefore, a better understanding of the possible centrality of education in contributing to the satisfaction of needs, and its impact on well-being.

Introduction

What attracts the attention of a social scientist when he critically observes the present society? Using the analytical lens of the "risk society" and the one provided by studies on reflexive modernity, his / her attention will surely focus on the contradictions of a society that, on the one hand, provides life expectancy never before attained and concentrates much of its energy on the citizens' well-being. But at the same time, "a society that is experiencing unprecedented levels of stress, mental illness and anxiety about the future – combined with the adoption of public policies that require individuals

to take responsibility for planning against future risk.” (Field, 2009). In the contradiction between symptoms and effects, the lives of people are punctuated by a cloak of unpredictability and uncertainty. The profound changes taking place in basic social institutions (family, school, State, market, labour world ...) make the results of individual decisions in certain areas of everyday life less predictable and increase the notion of risk.

But there are positive things to keep, such as important steps towards equality and equity, between genders and between generations. Or that people today have more freedom and ability to determine their own lives, to be the actors, the designers, the jugglers and the directors of their own biography and identity, their social networks, their commitments and convictions (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 2000). We also perceive that learning is more and more necessary as a resource for constant adaptation, for increasing critical reflection and for widening the *viewing possibilities* offered to the individuals (Gomes & Monteiro, 2009). And that education has a responsibility to provide a learning context that favours the establishment of a significant relationship between the understanding of needs, the perception of opportunities and the awareness of personal capabilities (needs matrix).

Science, on the other hand, must also keep up with the complexity of realities and provide new answers to the daily anxieties and structural problems. Accompanying this trend, the physical and social sciences have been endowed with new tools for measuring phenomenon that were previously believed un-measurable and the required conceptual framework for interpreting such measurements (Krueger & Stone, 2014). Well-being, quality of life, progress, freedom, suffering or happiness are just a few examples of concepts that mobilize the attention of the scientific community, but also interfere with collective life and increasingly determine public social policies.

Even if we still often hear that “well-being means different things to different people”, to have a meaningful impact, whether in public policy, business or the third sector, the concept of well-being must be made concrete and measurable (OECD, 2017). Among several definitions that are proposed, we retain the one that is presented by Hicks et al., according to which, “Human well-being remains variously defined but can be thought of as a state of being with others, where human needs are met, when individuals can act meaningfully to pursue self-defined goals, and when they can enjoy

a satisfactory quality of life.” (2016, p. 38). An important aspect in the way the idea of well-being is conceived today is that it derives not only from material aspects related to the physical subsistence of individuals but extends to the cultural, environmental and psychosocial domains of life, in dimensions such as security, dignity, freedom of choice and action, equal opportunities, or access to education and learning.

The same goes for the concept of "needs". As can be seen from the above definition, the dimension corresponding to the satisfaction of needs is an integral part of the concept and idea of well-being. In the conduct of their daily lives, individuals are confronted with the emergence of needs that have to be met in the name of well-being and quality of life. On the contrary, their non-satisfaction translates into deprivation and damage, more or less profound depending on the place that this need occupies in the individuals' management of daily life, as well as in the fulfilment of their expectations and aspirations towards the future.

Made more visible through Abraham Maslow's famous pyramid of needs, the concept does not refer only to a set of primary (physiological and safety) and secondary (social and affective) needs. They are also the centre of a dynamic process that crosses personal and collective biographies, interposing between what is lacking in the present and the recognition of aspirations and expectations towards the future. When consciously perceived, needs mobilize on the part of individuals a perception of the resources and opportunities, the identification of obstacles and possible damages, and the capacities they are able to activate to meet those needs. In short, we speak of a complex social construction that directly interferes with the individuals' well-being and quality of life.

This text is based on an investigation conducted in Portugal between 2008 and 2010, entitled "Unmet Needs in Portugal - Tradition and emerging trends". Framed by a reflection on contemporary transformations in Portuguese society, the purpose of the study was to identify broadly the needs considered unsatisfied in mainland Portugal. Among other strategies, the study in question sought to develop an operative notion of needs, interpreting them as generated by the non-achievement of individual aspirations/expectations, through mismatch between opportunities and capabilities, in a dynamic process between the social context of action and the individual (Gata &

Almeida, 2013). In addition, the research focused on how six groups of individuals, sharing certain conditions and life experiences, face the complex relationship that involves the satisfaction of their needs.

Towards a definition of needs

The distinction and the possibility of classifying different types of needs are the focus of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. For Abraham Maslow, "talking about the needs of human beings is talking about the essence of their lives" (1970, p. xii), and its satisfaction emerges as the main driving force of human action.

According to this author, it would be possible to differentiate two fundamental types of human needs: primary needs, divided between physiological needs (sleep, clothing, food, air, water, sex) and security (protection, defence, housing, employment), and secondary needs, which include social and affective needs (participation, understanding, desire for association, belonging, friendship, acceptance), needs related to self-esteem (responsibility, power, recognition of others, identity, social status, self-confidence, recognition) and self-realization (achievement of objectives, initiative, skills, fulfilment of individual potential) (Ferreira, Neves, & Caetano, 2001, p. 262).

These needs arise gradually in order, both in their importance and in the order by which they are satisfied. That is, physiological needs are the ones that primarily influence the human behaviour, which is oriented to its priority satisfaction. Once these needs are met, the attention of individuals shifts to new patterns of needs, with the ability to influence new behaviours.

This statement about the existence of a hierarchical ordering of needs and a temporal sequence in its satisfaction has been one of the most criticized aspects in Maslow's theory. Allegedly, because everyday life reveals circumstances in which individuals appear to be more motivated to meet the so-called secondary needs, to the detriment of primary needs (Doyal & Gough, 1991). Just as "[Maslow's] theory fails to account for the cultural specificity in the valuation of needs, both in terms of content and prioritization" (Ferreira, Neves, & Caetano, 2001, p.263).

Len Doyal and Ian Gough are among the authors who offered alternatives to Maslow's theory. Essentially exposed in *Theory of Human Need*, these two authors

proposal is based on an essential postulate: there are basic universal needs, common to all human beings, which are independent of any particular social environment (Doyal & Gough, 1991; Pinto, Guerra, Martins, & Almeida, 2010). On the opposite, the objects, activities and relationships - the so-called satisfiers - mobilized in their satisfaction are not universal but culturally and socially related. In their perspective, the basic needs identified as universally common to all human beings are physical health and what they call autonomy. Of their satisfaction depends the preservation of physical and intellectual capacities, as well as the possibility of daily participation in social life. If needs are not satisfied then serious *harm* of some objective kind will result, namely an inhibition to successful social *participation* (Gough, 2003).

For Doyal and Gough, the notion of physical health is not reduced to mere survival:

If you wish to lead an active and successful life in your own terms, it is in your objective interest to satisfy your basic need to optimise your life expectancy and to avoid serious physical disease and illness conceptualised in biomedical terms. This applies to everyone, everywhere. (Doyal & Gough, 1991, p. 59).

On the other hand,

[t]o be autonomous in this minimal sense is *to have the ability to make informed choices about what should be done and how to go about doing it*. This entails being able to formulate aims, and beliefs about how to achieve them, along with the ability to evaluate the success of these beliefs in the light of empirical evidence. (Doyal & Gough, 1991, p. 59).

The different levels of autonomy are influenced by the degree of understanding that individuals have of themselves, their culture and expectations, their mental health and the existence of opportunities for action.

As is easily identified, and the authors themselves recognize it (Gough, 2003), there is a clear affinity between this theory and the capabilities approach developed by

Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (1993). For the last two authors, capabilities are defined as the ability, aptitude or potentiality to do or be something, that is, to achieve certain functioning considered valuable. These functioning are distributed among the domains of doing (ex: reading books, going to the cinema, cycling, etc.) or being (ex: being - nourished, having self - respect and self - esteem, being socially integrated, etc.). On the other hand, the capability of a person depends on a variety of factors, including personal characteristics and social arrangements (Sen, 2003). Which brings us to the idea that autonomy of agency requires a range of opportunities (collectively provided and individually mobilized) to undertake socially significant activities. The interest of this approach in the field of needs analysis lies in being able to conceive the needs genealogical process as a game between an individual with certain capabilities and a system that presents itself with certain opportunities (Pinto, Guerra, Martins, & Almeida, 2010).

Needs: conceptual model

The definition of needs developed in the framework of the research "Unmet Needs in Portugal - Tradition and emerging trends" incorporates the theoretical influences of Gough and Doyal, as well as the contributions of Nussbaum and Sen, proposing to define need as:

something reporting to a multidimensional set of elements (not simply associated with the physical survival of individuals), whose deficient and / or unsatisfactory provision can cause harm to people, families and societies - physical, psychological or social damages, which obstruct to the full social insertion of individuals and disrupt and impair the optimization of the opportunities of individual and collective life (Pinto et al., 2010, p. 67).

This definition entails the distinction between two dimensions: subjective, associated with a multidimensional set of perceptions of deficit or lack of something wanted or desired; and objective, reported to a set of damages individually and / or

socially identified and recognized as expressions or practical manifestations of deficit states.

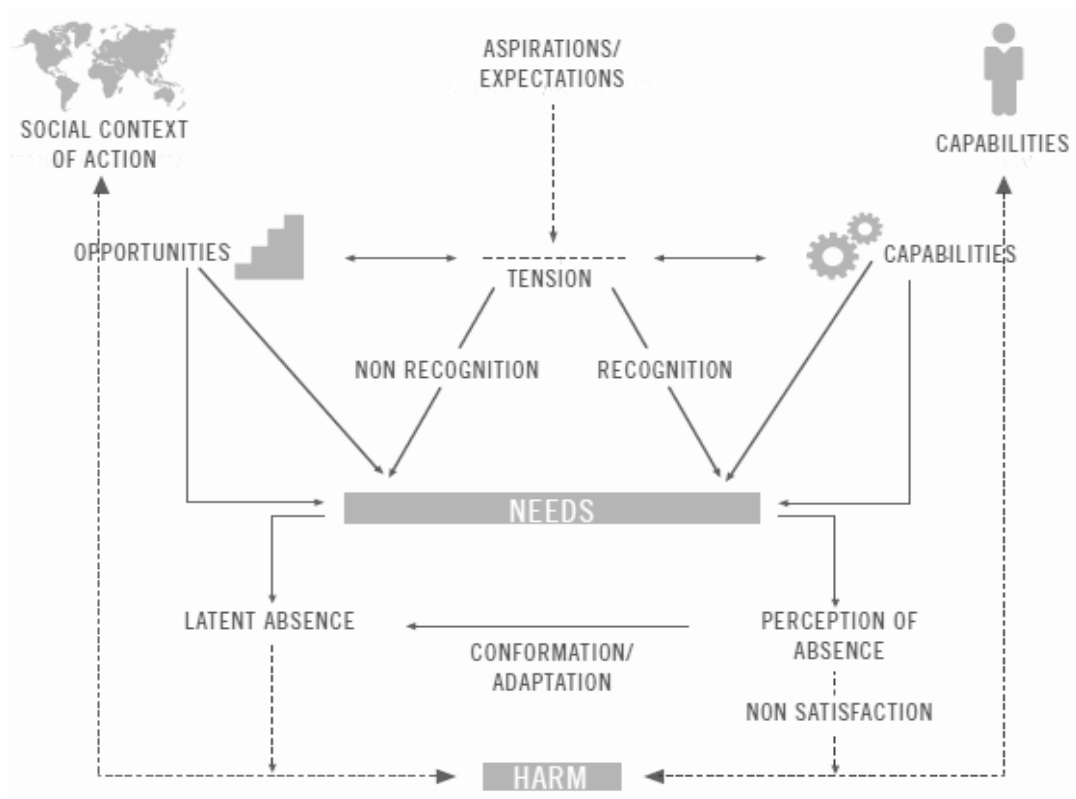


Figure 1. Conceptual model (Source: Gata & Almeida, 2013)

According to the proposed definition, needs are not understood as stages but as dynamic processes of encounters and discrepancies between the capabilities and opportunities of individuals and social collectives. Needs derive, then, from a process of adjustment (dialectic and interactive) between capabilities and opportunities. The number and type of opportunities available may limit or enhance the acquisition and exercise of capabilities. For its part, the detention of certain capabilities can be seen as a means of creation and achievement of opportunities, increasing the individual's ability to choose (Pinto et al., 2010).

In the set of intervening variables, stands out the propulsive and mediating functions performed by the aspirations, and by the expectations.

Aspirations refer to existing goals in the realm of the ideal, that is, what you would like to achieve if you were free of constraints if you had the necessary resources.

Expectations, in turn, refer to the domain of the possible, are real hopes about the accomplishment of something, and result from the estimation of resources and the perception of a favourable or unfavourable context. In the inevitable tension between capabilities and opportunities, aspirations and expectations emerge as modellers of needs, both in terms of their expression and their satisfaction, in the context of processes that are linked to historically emerging values or to cultural and psychological particularities (Brage, cited in Pinto et al., 2010).

Finally, the "silence of needs" refers to the situation of individuals who, as Ballester Brage points out, do not recognize or, although identifying needs, do not express them. The hidden state of the needs or their silencing may be due to several factors: not assigning importance to certain objects of deprivation; non-expression and recognition of needs due to skills deficit; incorporation of damages as a result of "normal" circumstances; or transference from a perception of necessity to the domain of desire, of aspiration. One important idea conveyed by the author quoted is that this silencing of needs often happens in people who suffer from real deprivation, but who are also the ones who have the least demands. Or, more seriously, they ignore an important part of the needs that are collectively considered to be important to satisfy.

Methods

How do you live in a changing Portugal? How do different social groups, in the diversity of their lifestyles, meet their needs and outline a life project? How do you see the future of your children and what confidence do you place in others and institutions for everyday survival? These and other questions were the basis of the research project "Unmet Needs in Portugal - Tradition and emerging trends", developed in Portugal by the non-governmental organization TESE - Development Association, in partnership with other national entities and individual researchers, among them we are included, and with the scientific support of Young Foundation, an English NGO.

It is important to mention that the project was initiated at a time when Portugal was experiencing uncertain and risky times as a consequence of a serious financial crisis and the consequent request for financial assistance to the IMF (International Monetary

Fund) and to the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF). Country's economic and social crisis, with serious consequences on the lives of the people and especially the most vulnerable groups, made it urgent to question development priorities, social policies and strategies, to meet the needs and promote a better quality of life for the populations. In short, to think about the future of the country not only in the short term but above all in the framework of a long-term, multifaceted and comprehensive vision. And, in that sense, knowledge of needs was seen as part of strengthening the capacity to define interventions that address the causes of phenomena and not just their apparent manifestations (Pinto et al., 2010).

The mobilization of several data collection techniques was envisaged as an option consonant with the dual purpose of the project, that is, an extensive mapping of the unmet needs and, at the same time, the development of case studies illustrative of the (in) satisfaction of needs processes. Three research phases were defined:

a) Collection, systematization and analysis of secondary statistical information, to define and frame the main characteristics of contemporary Portuguese society;

b) Application of a large questionnaire survey, aimed at understand the perceived lack and damage expressed by the population resident in mainland Portugal;

c) Six case studies, focused on how groups of individuals, sharing certain conditions and life experiences, face the complex relationship that involves the satisfaction of their needs: “sandwiched families”, overloaded workers, individuals with small-scale economic activities, adults in training transition, adults in transition to retirement and isolated elderly.

In addition to the macro approach, this research focused on the concrete situation of people, gave them a voice to express their needs (perceptions and experiences) and ways of satisfying them. We will focus on this dimension of the study, particularly on two groups under analysis: adults in transition to retirement and adults in training transition. We chose the first group because it allows us to analyse how these (older) adults live an important period of transition and the consequent recomposition of their needs that this stage of life (the transition to retirement) entails. In the case of adults in training transition, we believe that the testimonies of this group (not necessarily composed of older adults) help us to understand how learning processes (at

least, formal ones) interfere with the questioning, understanding and fulfilment of unmet needs. Therefore, a better understanding of the possible centrality of education in contributing to the satisfaction of needs, and its impact on well-being.

After all, because both groups are experiencing a transition process, we can look at them as "learners in a changing learning landscape" (Merriënboer & Stoyanov, 2008), the two groups are united by this common characteristic.

Results

Analysing the case studies, it was possible to identify some traits that cross across the six profiles (in a total of 54 interviews). We highlight four: a) individual recognition of a subjection to collective dynamics that, although close in the effects daily generated, are perceived as distant and not controllable. As if they escape to personal intervention. b) if the collective future joins the notion of fortuity, on the contrary, the individual and family spheres are assumed as their own responsibility. c) with regard to vulnerabilities and unmet needs, they are interpreted as due more to a deficit or a blockage of opportunities than to a lack of capacity. d) the perception of unmet needs, especially physical and of resources, and the difficulties in dealing with this situation in daily life, accentuate feelings of social injustice, and that the State proves incapable of ensuring desirable living standards.

Recognizing this common basis, each of the groups/profiles interviewed denotes different perceptions and pathways.

Adults in transition to retirement

Six men and women aged between 58 and 66 years old were interviewed, with a common characteristic: the recent transition to retirement, in a range between 6 and 12 months. However, the circumstances which led them to this situation, which arise from the age limit or result from early retirement, voluntary or due to external circumstances, are different.

With a focus on the modes and scenarios of transition to retirement, our aim was to ascertain the framework of needs and expectations of the new retirees (what future

do they project, what satisfies them and what do they require?), and the way the more or less traumatic transition scenarios influence activation capacity and social participation.

Against discourses that are still socially disseminated, several studies call attention to the fact that, less and less, the transition to retirement is personally seen as a bad period of life, an antechamber to a cycle of inactivity, dependence and social isolation. In what can be analysed from a relatively narrow case study, the trend described above seems to be confirmed. The testimonies collected reveal people who, once they reach retirement age, positively value this new step and draw concrete projects for it. In the speeches produced it is difficult to find any moment in which any of these six individuals appears tired, incapable of exercising personal control over their life, or unwilling to initiate an active recomposition of their roles. Even if, as we shall see below, they do not always consider that society in general and the public authorities in particular tend to value such predispositions.

Once attained or anticipated the statutory age of exit from the labour market, some of these interviewees chose not to suspend a professionally relevant activity, while others seek new ways to occupy the time released. These new solutions include leisure activities, the reinforcement of cultural practices, the performance of familiar tasks or the learning of new skills. The desire to be useful to others through volunteerism and greater civic participation also appears in the discourse of all those interviewed. Such an attitude doesn't necessarily translate into effective behaviour because, in the opinion of some, the conditions for this are not always met, there are no encouragements or opportunities.

At the level of expressed needs, it is emphasized that, when questioned, our interlocutors in various circumstances anticipated their response of expressions such as "everything is done, so far everything is fine" or "I do not know, it seems that I have everything." After some insistence, they mentioned above all "socio-affective needs" and "personal development and well-being needs". That is, distanced from the needs of a more material or physiological nature. In fact, needs related to access to additional financial resources, support from the public subsystems of Health and Social Security or health conditions, they were less mentioned than would be expected.

Table 1

Adults in transition to retirement

Typology of Needs	
<i>Physical needs and resources (material and impersonal needs)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Additional financial resources (A, B, F) - Replacement activities (B, F) - Health (C, F) - Benefits in his parish (F) - A car for the son (B) - More effective public Health and Social Security systems (A, C)
<i>Skills and capabilities needs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning new skills (A, E) - Specialized studies (B, E) - Participation in local authorities (F)
<i>Social and relationship needs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To be useful to others, to volunteer (A, C, D, E) - Who helps in learning new skills (A) - Time with family (B, C, D) - Opportunities for socializing (D)
<i>Personal development and well-being needs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop new occupations (A, D, E) - Traveling and having holidays (B, C, D, F) - Cultural practices (read, go to the movies) (B, C, D, E) - Rest (D) - Increased availability to manage your time (E)

Source: Monteiro & Cruz, 2010b

All these needs are framed by discourses of reference to certain aspirations and expectations, where the dominant notes are, on the one hand, the drawing of a thin line between what one would wish and what one would like to do and, on the other hand, the mention to personal projects and initiatives that allow meeting the satisfaction of

the expressed needs. There is a strong desire to maintain activity, whether it is the occupation of time (reading, listening to music, going to the movies, traveling ...) or by learning new skills (computing, new ways of doing agriculture or patchwork techniques, to join the Senior University) or by volunteering.

If the discourse on expectations and aspirations is relatively diffuse, the awareness of the constraints is already much more acute. Thus, in the way the interviewees interpret obstacles to the guarantee of well-being, the management of an autonomous life and the pursuit of their objectives, we can identify constraints of three natures: upstream constraints, downstream constraints and *in itinere* constraints. Upstream, individuals claim that they were not able to autonomously and freely choose their passage to retirement, but were "pushed" out of the system. A scenario that has repercussions on personal lifestyle and over the choices that are within their reach. Because they feel "pushed", it seems that many of these individuals are "angry with the system" and with the current model of society: "disillusionment," "lack of confidence," "instability," "clown role", are some of the messages conveyed. Today, once they have withdrawn from the labour market, they maintain a discourse of criticism regarding the way society is organized (health, economy, employment, politics, poverty), but also a complaint on how civic awareness is low and people are "stuck". Downstream, they are especially worried about worsening health conditions and physical dependence.

As a consequence of this critical reading, they believe that the main resources at their disposal essentially come from themselves and from the capacity they demonstrate to stay active, along with the support they receive from their families. Three of the interviewees acknowledge that retirement has provided them with a fundamental resource, which is a better quality of life.

Adults in training transition

This part of the research gives voice to a very specific group, that of adults who are in training transition. The study explores what this "transition" means, and to what needs it responds, in the individuals' subjectivity. And it seeks to discover the instabilities and yearnings that such an experience produces between needs and aspirations: which unclaimed desires or faults (aspirations) become necessities of the present (needs)?

What possible tensions arise in their ways of living? When one travels to the opportunities offered by the system, how do the actors return, and in what way does this "journey" lead to an increase in *life-chances*?

In this group, 6 individuals, 3 males and 3 females, between 25 and 56 years old were interviewed. They are divided into two sub-profiles: a) recent graduates in search of a professional activity compatible with their qualifications; b) adults in training under the New Opportunities Program, which was part of the National Lifelong Learning Strategy and aimed at upgrading the qualifications of the Portuguese population.

For the purposes of the ongoing research it will be interesting to note how, without separation between recent graduates and those adults in additional training, the centrality of the topic education / training - employment exhausts discourses, just as it seems to deplete energies. Such a topic occupies all the centrality of their thinking, even when the protagonists want to address other subjects. That is, it seems to have become clear that the involvement in an education / learning dynamic brought them new perspectives and horizons, broke down barriers, involved them in new references and needs. In short, it is changing their lives.

In the interview analysis, it is clear the influence of a recent graduation or training course on the formatting of those that are considered by the interviewees as their main needs. Not only do "skills and capabilities needs" emerge as the most mentioned, but they are also elevated to the level of primary needs, to the detriment of other needs such as financial resources, housing, consumer goods or other. They also interfere with the recognition of damages (what happens if I do not have qualifications and / or qualifications) and also in the revelation of personal capabilities.

Table 2

Adults in training transition

Typology of Needs

<i>Physical needs and resources</i>	- A new means of transport (B, F)
<i>(material and impersonal needs)</i>	- A stable and compatible job (A, B, D, E, F) - A new job (C) - Health for you and your family (A, B) - Security (B) - Greater environmental balance in your community (C) - A business in its own name (E) - Greater cultural offer in the region (E) - Job creation in the region (F) - Support by the local authorities (F)
<i>Skills and capabilities needs</i>	- Practical work experience (A, B) - Greener habits (C) - Learning new things (C) - More qualifications and better (higher) qualifications (D, E, F) - Professional contacts (E) - More information (F)
<i>Social and relationship needs</i>	- Family support (A, B) - Opportunities (A) - Emotional balance (B, F) - "make yourself known and integrate" in the community (B) - The affection of a child (who does not have) (C) - The support of others (C) - Participation in associative life (C) - Greater stability and living conditions for the family (D)

- Personal development and well-being needs*
- Time (A)
 - Tranquillity / Calm (A)
 - Self-confidence (C)
 - More ambition (C, F)
 - Emotional stability (E)
 - A "good aging" (F)

Source: Monteiro & Cruz, 2010a

Within the same line of reasoning, it is observed the particular concentration of aspirations and expectations around the cycle acquisition of competencies → professional achievement:

Only if life does not provide me, but as long as I can, my priority now is my professional life. It's grabbing the training to play in my practice, because I think it's already bad without training, so the more we can do the better ... I think we have to be able to go beyond the job market somehow, do not we? And I think one of the aspects is that we have weapons. (*Case 1, 2:27*)

The discourse on the desired future encompasses two dimensions. On the one hand, the ambition of a socially recognizable and valued path: greater and better qualifications, a stable and secure professional career, insertion in the community; on the other hand, the projection on the path of Ego and his / her family, on the level of happiness, calmness, good environment, balance, self-confidence, emotional stability.

It will be more questionable, in the opposite, the influence that training may have on other dimensions of the personal biography, namely in the acquisition and consolidation of an autonomy. As stated by Doyal and Gough (1991) as one of the basic needs, the different levels of autonomy are influenced by individuals' own level of understanding, of their culture and the expectations addressed to them, their mental health and the existence of opportunities for action. The evidence gathered in this area shows a fragile perception of the opportunities available, which will eventually reflect on the definition of their own objectives and strategies.

In other words, the relationship between capabilities and opportunities seems to be "wounded". Not only because of the low understanding of available opportunities, surrounded by scepticism and discouraging messages (constant affirmations that there is no work for recent graduates or the sceptical look on the New Opportunities Program). But also, because the training path is essentially geared to building individual capabilities and adapting those capabilities to existing opportunities, rather than investing in revealing new opportunities. This leads us to put the hypothesis of relevant consequences on the perception of life-chances and even reflected in a "silence of the needs".

Discussion

In the complex equation of needs, our investigation has pointed to the existence of factors that favour or inhibit the ability to resist, overcome difficulties, that is, to be resilient (Table 3). The reaction to adversity and the activation of protection mechanisms is dependent on individual capabilities and personal resources, in parallel with the mobilization of social resources, such as social networks and community resources and supports.

Table 3

Resilience enhancers / inhibitors

Enhancers / Inhibitors	
<i>Personal capabilities and resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Self esteem- Self confidence- Dominant disposition (attitude towards life)- Aspirations and project capability- Age- Life cycle stage- Sense of social mobility- Level of qualifications and competences- Income level and stability
<i>Social Supports</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Social capital:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Family cohesion- Friendship and neighbourhood networks- Economic capital- Institutional social support
<i>Contextual factors: resources and support from the community</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Job market- Training opportunities- Access to collective services and equipment (school, health, etc.)- Social protection systems

Source: Pinto et al., 2010

But the research also reveals that the ontological security of the Self rests equally on the ability to maintain a certain level of aspirations and to structure his/her own life projects. It seems to be this "competence" that allows them to understand the permanent confrontation between capabilities and opportunities, and to be engaged in the implementation of the defined strategies, simultaneously fostering confidence in

themselves, allowing them to accept temporary setbacks and to look at difficulties as provisional (Pinto et al., 2010).

Confronted with the testimonies of two groups, what do we verify? In the case of adults in transition to retirement, the testimonies collected challenge the socially established idea that aspirations, expectations and needs are limited to the desire to age with autonomy and to have the support of the family (Quaresma & Graça, 2006). The transition to retirement is for these individuals a challenge towards the reorganization of personal existence and to the occupation of liberated time. Although this vision of the desirable future is often hampered by the perception of factors that obstacle the guarantee of a well-being, the management of an autonomous life and the pursuit of their objectives.

In adults in training transition, we witnessed the constraints placed by lack of horizons and initiative. As we have already mentioned, there is a fragile perception of the opportunities available, which will eventually reflect on the definition of their own objectives and strategies. And the additional training does not seem to go beyond this handicap, at least no evidence has been obtained.

It is at this point that we question what the role of lifelong learning might be, in strengthening resilience and structuring projects for the future. If the role of education is limited to providing "useful learning for employability" (Lima, 2017), maximizing skills and adapting individuals to the competitive labour market, it will only marginally feed the perception of new opportunities, solutions and resources. The narrowing of aspirations and the inability to develop life projects produces a "survival resilience" (Young Foundation, 2009), characterized by low autonomy and few activation capacities.

An education which, in the light of this debate, enhances the autonomy of thinking and the ability to maintain a certain level of aspiration and to formulate life projects, must, in our view, respect three conditions. Firstly, as an experience of conscientization (Freire, 1972) or of "transforming learning" (Mezirow, 2006), the learning process should begin with a critical self-reflection on assumptions (capabilities, opportunities, resources, goals, aspirations expectations, etc.), our own and those of others. That is, a reflexive path and a strong critical conscience. This subjective approach becomes a priority since we are increasingly facing "ill-structured problems"

(Merriënboer & Stoyanov, 2008) which are determined by the new societal challenges and defy our ability to understand the world. Then, to emphasize how the individual's relationship with the world is unique, variable and may be the opportunity to experience a wide range of possibilities (Monteiro, Gomes, & Herculano, 2010). Depending on the place we choose and where we can go, what we see is obviously different. In this sense, we understand that, within the process of autonomous learning, individuals should be led to experience different positions in the landscape, exploring the environment (different perspectives) and controlling the consequences of their decisions - in an atmosphere of challenge and support, action and reflection. What is at stake is not only the "informative" dimension of learning dynamics but also the *transform*-active process that redefines the form and content of knowledge. Therefore, as third condition, learning should be oriented to encourage the learner to critically analyse his past, present and future, in a context of biographical learning and critical reflection. As well as challenging him to dialogue with other agents and collectives, in search of shared identities, the reinforcement of critical awareness and the ability to act together.

Going back to the (unmet) needs scenario and the relationship between its perception and its satisfaction, lifelong learning (in senior universities, in training courses or in any other context), may be that "safe harbour" where those individuals find a positive environment and are helped to solve the tension between capabilities and opportunities. In short, lifelong learning as a resilience factor and a contribution to the optimization of individual and collective life opportunities.

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