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Training policy among vulnerable unemployed groups: its contextualisation and difficult relationship with the capabilities approach

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ABSTRACT

Vocational training, aimed mainly at the most vulnerable groups of unemployed, was introduced in Spain during the 1980s, at a time of rising unemployment. Since then, its main objective has been integrating these people into the labour market; however, the results are unsatisfactory. In this regard, the seven focus group interviews carried out in the province of Cadiz (Spain) with different vulnerable groups show how the courses contribute significantly to the psychosocial well-being of the students. The findings are augmented by others obtained from 12 in-depth interviews with representatives of training centres and a survey of collaborating training centres of the Junta de Andalucía. These results are analysed based on Sen's capabilities approach and the human capital approach. In particular, the interviews with the centres representatives point to the existence of control relations on the part of the administration. Other factors, such as relationships between organisations and training regulations, also play a role. All this leads to the fact that the training for the unemployed does not favour the creation of opportunities for vulnerable groups and for centres to develop initiatives according to their needs and preferences, in line with the capability approach.

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Introduction

Since the 1980s, and coinciding with the rise of neoliberal governments, vocational training has primarily been aimed at the most vulnerable groups amongst the unemployed. However, although the goal of vocational training is labour market insertion, the rate of unemployment for these vulnerable groups continues to give rise to concern, having actually worsened in most countries during the 2007–2008 financial crisis (Danneris and Caswell 2019). Employment issues amongst vulnerable groups are expected to represent a major political

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challenge in the coming years (Danneris and Caswell 2019). Moreover, in recent decades, employment conditions in many countries have deteriorated, having a particularly dramatic impact on those countries' most vulnerable populations (Kjeldsen and Bonvin et al. 2015, 22; Beck 2018; Beck and Beck 2020).

In addition to the emphasis that vocational training puts on labour market insertion, another unique characteristic is the large involvement of civil society organisations and private businesses, which has increased in recent years around the world (Bromley, Schofer, and Longhofer 2018), especially in terms of offering services to vulnerable unemployed groups. The involvement of diverse organisations highlights the need to include context when analysing this type of training. Kwon and Lane (2016) note that experiences and interpretations regarding unemployment are shaped by cultural, local and national characteristics, and by the policies implemented. They highlight that in order to understand unemployment and how it affects individuals, it must be studied within its specific context. Similarly, Beck and Beck (2020), 938–939) notes that while extensive research has been conducted on a macro level to analyse the harmful effects of unemployment, evidence is lacking regarding perceptions, values and attitudes of the unemployed at a micro level, and regarding how these individuals experience the highs and lows of their employment and training trajectories. Given the relevance of context, this article analyses results from research conducted in 2018 in the Spanish province of Cádiz. For this purpose, seven focus group interviews were conducted with different vulnerable groups participating in training courses, and 12 in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of training centres, including federations for the disabled, business associations, non-governmental organisations, trade unions and social enterprises.

The focus group interviews with members of the vulnerable unemployed groups – including young people with low education levels, people with disabilities and people experiencing long-term unemployment – elicited their opinions on work and training. Additionally, they highlighted the relevance of training to improve the psychosocial well-being of the unemployed. On the other hand, representatives of training centres emphasised that training actions seek to enhance the labour insertion of individuals from vulnerable groups without adequately considering the economic difficulties in a context with high rate of unemployment, or their personal and social difficulties. Such oversights mainly arise because organisations are limited by the criteria defined in the training programmes, which take a human capital approach, regarding work as a key factor in the fulfilment of material needs that serves as a strong link for social cohesion. From this viewpoint, work is a key activity for social recognition, self-esteem and self-realisation (Noguera 2002, 150). However, it has been increasingly suggested that 'work is no longer an essential source of social rights, freedoms, economic progress and social cohesion' (Manzanera Román, Ortiz García, and Hernández Pedreño 2016, 32) given the precariousness of

working conditions, especially amongst vulnerable groups. Even recent studies reflect on the ‘death’ of human capital, recognising the limitations of narrow concepts of employability (Powell and McGrath 2019a; Powell 2021; Wheelahan and Moodie 2022, 2017; Wheelahan et al. 2019). Given these limitations, we propose using the capability approach for a better, complementary understanding of vocational training for the unemployed. Capability is understood as an essential aspect of freedom related to meaningful opportunities for individuals to become and do what they believe is important in their lives (Sen 2010, 317); from this perspective, unemployment clearly limits freedom.

Vocational training in Spain began in 1985, following the guidelines of the European Union and with the early involvement of local entities in the training and job placement of unemployed people. Since its inception, this training has given preference to unemployed groups facing particular difficulties with labour market insertion, and has sought as its primary objective to serve as a bridge for the labour insertion of the unemployed and to improve firms’ competitiveness (Reboredo and Sebastián 1995, 708). Recent regulations on training for employment also stipulate a link to companies’ qualification needs in order to facilitate the labour market insertion of the most vulnerable unemployed groups (Carvajal 2021a). However, this objective is undermined by the unique personal and social obstacles among vulnerable groups, as well as contextual difficulties that hinder labour insertion in Cadiz – which had an unemployment rate of 22% in 2021 (EPA,¹ Labour Force Survey).

Based on these premises, the following section examines some of the factors that limit freedoms in relation to the capacity approach. We then present the research goals along with the methodologies used. This is followed by results and analysis related to the theoretical elements detailed below. The final section articulates conclusions and final reflections.

Training for vulnerable unemployed individuals and the contributions of the capability approach

Within the human capital approach, training programmes for unemployed people postulate that training helps learners to become more productive, thereby contributing to economic development (López-Fogues 2016; Wheelahan and Moodie 2011; Wheelahan et al. 2019; Alla-Mensah and McGrath 2021). Since vocational training focuses primarily on the economic dimension (Robeyns 2005, 99; Bonvin 2019, 279), it often overlooks several factors, thereby limiting the conversion of available resources into significant achievements in the lives of the individuals undergoing such training. By applying the human capital approach and the capability approach, Schröer et al. (2015), 368) distinguishes five external conversion factors: 1) social, 2) political, 2) economic, 4) regulatory and 5) institutional. These elements are associated with the contents of Table 1, in which some variations with regard to the

Table 1. Two training policy models for vulnerable groups.

Conversion factors	Training and human capital approach	Training and human capability approach
(1) Economic sphere	Training linked to the traditional economy	Training also linked to sustainable social development (holistic understanding)
(2) Regulatory design	Discourse surrounding training linked to work	Discourse surrounding training not linked solely to work
(3) Understanding of work	Work as a key element for social integration linked to the market	Broader understanding of work beyond the market
(4) Diversity of organisations involved in training	Typology of employability-focused organisations	Typology of organisations cooperating with each other, and with vulnerable people and the community
(5) Vision of the human being	The individual as a means to an economic end	Individuals as an end in themselves

Author's own creation based on the work of Bonvin (2019) and Schröer et al. (2015).

research conducted in Cádiz have been included, with more emphasis on the diversity of organisations involved and related to the institutional factor highlighted by Schöer. The normative discourse, and differences in perceptions of work and the human being between the two approaches, are also considered in the analysis.

Given the influence of the human capital approach, vocational training emphasises an individualistic element focused on qualification improvement and the level of labour insertion achieved by the trainee. Thus, it neglects the social and personal differences that exist among the most vulnerable unemployed people (McGrath and Powell 2014; Schröer et al. 2015; Powell 2012; Bonvin 2019; Powell and McGrath 2019b). The term vulnerability here encompasses all aspects and situations that undermine the individual's bargaining power, and thus real opportunities to lead a life of value to themselves and others (López Fogues 2012, 3). Paradoxical situations persist in which the focus of training is on conventional, market-linked work, even in economic environments with significantly high unemployment rates. These paradoxes are best understood by considering historical changes occurring in the field of vocational training and the labour market over recent decades.

In the period immediately following World War II, from 1950 to the 1980s, employment helped to define people's relationships with gender and their life trajectories beyond work. Moreover, it established the constructs of social relations and social status (Prieto 2000; Beck 2001; Kwon and Lane 2016, 6). Since the 1980s, with the onset of the employment crisis, there has been a focus on vocational training that pays special attention to vulnerable unemployed groups. Since then, education and training have been considered key elements that can help overcome the shortcomings that exist in other policy domains (Buchanan et al. 2020, 3). However, the idea of solving inequalities through vocational training is part of an ideology that does not directly address the limitations of current economic development (Buchanan et al. 2020, 4). In this

way, a direct relationship is established between training, labour market insertion and economic productivity, and often overlooks differences between individuals and territories. This perception justifies a linear relationship between education deficiencies and unemployment, and yields to the argument that the unemployed are to blame for their educational and training deficiencies (Buchanan et al. 2020, 5).

From these principles, and aligned with the human capital approach, training focuses on commodified work. Conversely, the capability approach understands work from a perspective that extends beyond the economic sphere and includes other aspects of self-realisation (Bonvin 2012; Schröer et al. 2015, 382; Bonvin 2019; Powell 2021; Bonvin and Laruffa 2021).

The work is essential because it contributes to people's material and psychosocial well-being (Sen 1975; Jahoda 1981; Dieckhoff and Gash 2015; Pohlan 2019; Ivanov, Pfeiffer, and Pohlan 2020). Consequently, unemployment diminishes the well-being capability of unemployed people. In this regard, Dieckhoff and Gash (2015) conducted a survey in 22 European countries, and revealed that unemployment affects the level of social participation of the unemployed, who tend to retreat more into the private sphere. Kunze and Suppa (2017) analysed the prolonged damaging effects of unemployment over time. Similarly, other studies confirm that extended periods of unemployment may lead to increased levels of dissatisfaction with life and negatively impact mental health (Tuparevska, Santibáñez, and Solabarrieta 2019; Pohlan 2019; Ivanov, Pfeiffer, and Pohlan 2020; Beck and Beck 2020; Giugni et al. 2021, 59). These negative consequences of unemployment also impact the individual's organisation of daily time, social contact outside the immediate family circle, inclusion in a collective life purpose, social status and identity, and regular activity (Pohlan 2019, 276; Jahoda 1981).

Under these circumstances, unemployed individuals have few opportunities to exercise the agency capability, defined as 'the effective power of an individual to choose and do what they consider valuable in their life' (Sen 2010, 301). This capability for agency is exercised by active and responsible people who can critically reflect on their preferences and plans (López Fogues 2012, 3). Central to agency capability is the voice capability, which allows individuals to express themselves and present their opinions (Bonvin 2012, 16; Kjeldsen and Bonvin et al. 2015; Bonvin 2019; Powell 2021). The capability for agency is exercised by active and responsible people who can critically reflect on their preferences and plans (López Fogues 2012, 3). One of the most important capabilities within the agency capability is the voice capability, allowing individuals to express themselves and present their opinions (Bonvin 2012, 16; Kjeldsen and Bonvin et al. 2015; Bonvin 2019; Powell 2021). This also implies that their capability for agency needs to be adequately supported, independently from their contribution to economic growth (Bonvin and Laruffa 2021). In relation to the agency capability, Bonvin and Laruffa (2021) distinguish the 'receiver function' and the

'doer function' in employment activation policies. The former occurs when individuals are treated only as customers in insertion programmes. Here, they are mere recipients of this public service. The latter is achieved when individuals are involved in political programmes, and this dimension is strengthened by boosting the voice capability (Bonvin 2019). Recent studies on unemployment in Europe highlight the need to broaden some capabilities for the most vulnerable unemployed young people, placing special emphasis on the capabilities for work, education and voice (Kjeldsen and Bonvin et al. 2015; Bonvin 2019; Schröer et al. 2015). Improving this population's capabilities for work and education would allow them to choose better employment, education and training conditions, while improving their capability for voice would permit their increased participation in training design – for example, by giving them the opportunity to express their desires and expectations (Bonvin 2019, 284). To foster the capacity for voice, the involvement of social institutions in vocational training is essential.

Regarding institutional scope, some of the different types of organisations involved in vocational training include government and non-governmental organisations, trade unions, business confederations, federations for disabled people, and training and job placement centres. Some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also facilitate training opportunities for the most vulnerable groups, especially those with disabilities, in various national and international contexts (Makararavy and Anurit 2009; Messina 2013; Hilal 2019; Giugni et al. 2021). By definition, these organisations are closely tied to groups of the unemployed at risk of exclusion and, thus, can be expected to offer improved responses to the social and functional diversity of these unemployed people. However, they tend to deliver professional training courses with unsatisfactory results in terms of labour market insertion for the most vulnerable unemployed groups. In fact, research highlights a difficult relationship between vocational training for employment and employment itself, which has not been sufficiently challenged in Europe (Clarke, Westerhuis, and Winch 2021, 297; Powell and McGrath 2019b). Thus, it is pertinent to ask what these organisations bring to training opportunities (Billett and Seddon 2004, 52). How important are these organisations for vulnerable groups? How do they make their decisions and how do they interact with the government and other organisations? These issues directly relate to another essential question raised in this article: What are the factors that restrain these organisations from moving towards a training model based on the capability approach?

In this comparative analysis, it is important to consider the different ways of understanding the individual in each of the two approaches to vocational training (Walker 2012; Brown, Lauder, and Cheung 2020, 143). On the one hand, the human capital approach regards individuals as a means to an economic end – in other words, as economy producers and citizen-consumers. On the other hand, the capability approach, while recognising the productivity

element of training, typically considers training mainly as an instrument for human development, positioning the individual as an end (Kjeldsen and Bonvin et al. 2015). Thus, while the human capital approach relies on ontological reduction to understand the individual (Bonvin 2019; Powell and McGrath 2014; Powell 2021), the capability approach broadens this conceptualisation by recognising social diversity and the internal and external factors that curb freedom. This results in training designs that can adapt to the different needs of vulnerable groups of unemployed people, improving their interests and motivations while simultaneously creating a favourable educational environment that extends beyond economic interests (Wheelahan and Moodie 2011; Bartram and Cavanagh 2019; Tuparevska, Santibáñez, and Solabarrieta 2019; Lyons et al. 2019; De Greef, Segers, and Verte 2012). These issues will be addressed further in the paper's results section.

Objectives and methodology

This research seeks primarily to identify elements involved in the contradictions between vocational training focused on labour market insertion and the discourse of vulnerable unemployed individuals. Three objectives guided the research, which was conducted in 2018 in Cádiz, Spain:

- (A) Examine the perceptions of vulnerable unemployed groups participating in vocational training, the impact that this training has on their everyday lives, their definition of work and their expectations for future work and training.
- (B) Identify the positioning of the distinct types of organisations involved in training provided to the unemployed in Cádiz, the objectives outlined for the vocational training programmes, the types of unemployed groups these training opportunities address, the characteristics of the training programmes and the relations of training centres with the administration and with other organisations.
- (C) Analyse the regulatory discourse regulating training.

To achieve these objectives, we conducted seven focus group interviews with individuals from vulnerable groups who were undertaking a training course in 2018. Additionally, 12 in-depth interviews were conducted with training technicians or directors of public and private organisations providing vocational training. Information was also collected from some questions in a survey conducted with collaborating training centres (see [Tables 2 and 3](#)). The questionnaire was sent via email to the educational centres in the province. Based on the total number of registered centres (370 in 2019), 20% responded. Using this technique, information collected included the opinions of training staff on educating for labour market insertion and their perceptions of the actual

Table 2. Qualitative and quantitative research techniques.

12 in-depth interviews with training centres	7 focus group interviews with unemployed people	Typology of training centres surveyed (%)
2 government organisations	2 groups comprising young people under the age of 30 1 group comprising long-term unemployed individuals	24,5
2 federations for people with disabilities	1 group comprising individuals with mental disorders	3
1 Inserta Foundation	1 group comprising individuals with physical and organic disabilities	
1 trade union		1,5
1 business confederation	1 group comprising men aged 22–45	6,2
2 NGOs		6
3 training and integration centres	1 group comprising different types of unemployed individuals	47
		11,8% (Private companies)

Table 3. Analysis categories for focus group and in-depth interviews.

Categories for focus group interviews with vulnerable groups	Categories for in-depth interviews with training organisations	Survey: thematic block of questions.
(1) The meaning of work in their everyday lives.	1. Training programmes in which they participate.	
(2) General perceptions of training.	2. Relationships with the government.	<i>Relationships:</i> with the government.
(3) The importance of relationships with classmates.	3. Relationships between similar organisations.	<i>Assessment of training for the unemployed:</i> The importance of relationships with classmates.
(4) Contributions of the course to their daily lives.	4. Relationships between organisations of different types.	<i>Assessment of training for the unemployed:</i> Contributions of the course to their daily lives.
(5) Expectations for future training.	5. Relationships between training centres and businesses.	<i>Relationships:</i> between training centres and businesses.
(6) Expectations for future work.	6. Relationships between training centres and the unemployed students.	<i>Assessment of training for the unemployed:</i> Expectations for future work.

contribution of training to the psychosocial well-being of unemployed individuals. Discourse analysis was also conducted using reports and regulations on vocational training in Spain and Europe (Carvajal 2021a).

(1) The average duration of the seven focus group interviews was about 70 minutes, and each was attended by 8–12 people. A total of 66 unemployed people participated in the seven focus groups; there were two focus groups for young people and one focus group for each category of the remaining groups of unemployed people.

These interviews provide information about how the most vulnerable unemployed people develop their social construction around training and employment, reflecting a way of understanding the world in their context (Muñoz, Peña, and Urra 2013, 52; Cáceres 2003, 69–70), which, in turn, reveals how they

perceive their daily lives (Hernández Carrera 2014, 191). Specifically, their perceptions of training, labour market insertion and employment provide insight to 'explore their perceptions of reality and understand how they construct their specific social realities and also further understand the contradictions that they generate with regard to the context' (Muñoz, Peña, and Urra 2013, 51). The categories of analysis from the focus groups and in-depth interviews listed in Table 3 are essential in this regard.

In the following sections, each category of analysis from the focus group and in-depth interviews are detailed, comparing the results with the human capital and capabilities approaches.

Vulnerable groups, training centres and the capability approach

First, the results of the focus group interviews are presented, followed by the results of the in-depth interviews with the training centres. With regard to the focus interviews, all unemployed people particularly emphasised the relevance of work in the organisation of their daily life.

Unemployed vulnerable groups in training and employment

In terms of their evaluations of work, all unemployed individuals emphasised the relevance of work to organising their daily lives. Regarding positive aspects of work, the focus group participants considered work as their main source of material livelihood, providing security and contributing to social recognition. Regarding negative aspects of work, they highlighted the difficulties experienced in terms of labour market insertion and employment instability. They mentioned the fact that the labour market sometimes stigmatises disability, age, lack of work experience and/or lack of education. Both groups of unemployed people with disabilities stated that social prejudice makes it difficult for them to enter the labour market.

In general, and regarding the value of work in their daily lives, the interviewees stated that work helps them feel part of society. For example, a 44-year-old female participant, into the long-term unemployed group, stated, 'If you don't have a job you feel like an outcast, you feel bad.' A 43-year-old male explained, 'Not having a job sets many limits to your social life because you don't have money to go out.'

They also positioned work as a source of personal satisfaction. Unemployed people with disabilities particularly emphasised this, defining the meaning of work as follows: 'Work means life, satisfaction, fulfilment and feeling whole' (Male, 28, group with mental disorders) and 'Work is knowing that I am capable' (Female, 42, group with physical and organic disabilities). This focus on work means that being unemployed leads to feelings of embarrassment in the relationship between the unemployed and their environment, reducing their

social status. One interviewee, a 45-year-old female, expressed, 'It is embarrassing to have to say that you are unemployed.'

Karsten and Batinic (2010) note that individuals tend to view themselves similarly to how others see them. They show that even unqualified manual labourers feel better treated and receive more respect and recognition than unemployed individuals. In this sense, unemployed people experience a change in their subjective self-perception, an impact on their self-esteem and a reduction in their overall degree of life satisfaction due to their unemployed status (Pohlan 2019, 278; Giugni et al. 2021, 4). One interviewee described this loss of self-esteem as follows: 'It leaves you unmotivated; having to go to interviews and leave with nothing is demoralising. There are times when it really gets you down and you think; darn, this again, really?' (Female, 46 years old, long-term unemployed group).

Faced with this situation of unemployment, attending a vocational course brings a certain order or routine to daily life, and a sense of normality and hope, as recognised by the seven focus groups. However, the groups with physical and mental disabilities and the group of long-term unemployed were most insistent in this respect. A long-term unemployed 44-year-old female explained, 'For me, having something to do every day, between the hours of nine to two, has changed my life. Before, I was at home just stressing about the situation.' Another participant stated, 'Honestly, before taking part in the course, I would go to bed late and was just generally bored. Now, I wake up early, I have something to focus on. You just become more positive' (Male, 28, physical and organic disabilities group); a 31-year-old female in the group with mental disorders explained, 'The course gave me a routine and provided the group with motivation.' This shows that, on a psychosocial level, taking courses helps improve the well-being of students by offering them a common space where they can express themselves.

The perceptions of the students regarding sharing a common space during a course were closely related to the well-being capability. Unemployed individuals with physical disabilities, mental disorders or long-term unemployment placed higher emphasis on shared training experience. For example:

Here we are all in a very similar situation; we all feel understood and are able to say many things that we can't say outside this space. Here, I know that the other people are going to perfectly understand how I feel. They are not going to judge me.

(Female, 46, long-term unemployed group)

Another participant stated, 'We all understand each other; you might feel judged elsewhere but you don't here' (Female, 39, mental disorders focus group).

Finally, concerning lifelong learning, all vulnerable groups interviewed agreed on the lifelong nature of training for employment as inherent to the current labour market. One individual said, 'Training has to be continuous

because there is always something new happening, whether that be in terms of technology or anything else, and we have to be prepared' (Female, 26, under-30 group).

For Lima and Guimarães (2015, 250), lifelong learning goes hand in hand with labour flexibility and changes in the field of work, aiming to help the unemployed in their social and educational adaptation to the labour market. This may help overcome the issue of a loss of work centrality and mitigate the negative consequences of unemployment. According to Field (2009, 189), it is worth imagining a lifelong learning system that regards psychosocial well-being as its main *raison d'être*. From this viewpoint, vocational training policies could fulfil regulatory functions related to the unemployment problem (Brown, Ecclestone, and Emmel 2017, 498) by maintaining the passive status of the unemployed as mere recipients of benefits (Bonvin and Laruffa 2021). Thus, the doer dimension, linked to the agency capability of the unemployed, will continue to be neglected.

In accordance with the definition of capability, being unemployed or not having a paid job limits an individual's ability to lead the life that they wish for themselves (Sen 1975), and reduces their possibilities of living a dignified life. Work is not only necessary to cover basic needs (such as housing and food) but can also be a means to achieve certain states of psychosocial well-being that are fundamental to human existence. Faced with these limitations, the unemployed may feel they are not actually in control of work opportunities when it comes to accepting job offers and/or working conditions. They may also feel restricted in their choice of training courses based on work and training capabilities. In other words, the most vulnerable unemployed groups lack chances to decide what they consider to be valuable training and work, being restricted by internal and external factors and therefore forced to accept what is imposed upon them by employment services (Bonvin 2012; Wheelahan and Moodie 2011; Wheelahan et al. 2019).

Consequently, training, at best, means improving one's capability for psychosocial well-being and allowing the most vulnerable unemployed individuals to improve their self-confidence (McGrath et al. 2020, 27; Field 2009, 188; Waller et al. 2018, 398; Ivanov, Pfeiffer, and Pohlan 2020). However, the capability to act for vulnerable groups remains unaddressed. This is included under the umbrella of agency capabilities, which allow individuals to construct their own lives and become active and responsible agents in their decision-making (Sen 2010, 301).

To a large extent, the contributions of training are limited since they respond partially to the negative consequences of unemployment. Therefore, inconsistencies arise between established regulations, the perceptions of training staff and the insufficient achievements of the members of vulnerable groups themselves, especially regarding difficulties associated with labour market insertion in areas with a high unemployment rate.

To reverse this, measures should be taken in response to the realities of vulnerable groups. For example, if disadvantaged groups are to be integrated into conventional work contexts (linked to the labour market), actual opportunities must exist in this particular context, created by implementing empowerment strategies and eliminating discriminatory practices for the most disadvantaged groups (Bonvin 2012, 2019). These issues are associated with conversion factors internal and external to the individuals, which have a significant influence on the conversion of resources into effective functioning.

In fact, institutions decide what is considered 'valuable work' according to guidelines established in the training programmes, which are supposedly created in accordance to the types of jobs offered (Schröer et al. 2015, 368). Moreover, external conversion factors, be they social, economic or institutional, and the limitations of vulnerable groups, either due to disability, gender, age or education level, are rarely considered when designing training. This is despite the fact that these factors affect the abilities or skills of the unemployed to convert their resources into achievements or effective functioning in their lives (Bonvin 2019, 284).

Training centres for vulnerable unemployed people

The other area analysed in this study is the institutional sphere, which is considered an external conversion factor and, along with other conversion factors, affects the proper functioning of training policies for the unemployed and restricts or increases choices for vulnerable groups.

From the research results, it is worth noting that both public and private centres provide training courses in Cádiz. These include traditional organisations, such as business associations and trade unions, and other organisations that have become more active over recent decades, such as federations for the disabled, NGOs and social enterprises.

Local training centres exist throughout the province of Cádiz, and they are managed and subsidised by the Junta de Andalucía or the central government. Also noteworthy is the essential role played by some organisations concerning training, such as the Chamber of Commerce or the Spanish National Organization for the Blind (ONCE), which are empowered to call for courses throughout Spain.

The survey results from the collaborating centres indicate that the training programme of the Junta establishes overly strict controls on the accreditation of centres and training specialisations. In addition, the centres provided a negative assessment of the subsidy model. The training model of the Junta de Andalucía reinforces the hierarchical relationship of the administration over the collaborating training centres, limiting the space for their own initiatives and cooperation between organisations (Carvajal 2021b). The model also confirms the

relations between competition and a lack of cooperation between the organisations involved in training for the unemployed.

These training centres complement training actions with labour market insertion itineraries within the active employment policy programmes, including work placements in businesses that offer labour market counselling on how to write a CV or participate in job interviews. In addition, these services and the training are subject to control by the Andalusian regional government. As one training staff member from a federation for the disabled reported, 'The assessments, the criteria for the type of student, the curricula vitae of the training staff, etc., are all controlled by the regional government.' This hierarchical control is also evidenced by other open calls for courses by the ONCE organisation Fundosa, according to a staff member from a small training business:

Fundosa opens a call for all of Spain that states: I want to give a course consisting of X number of hours. We have to make a training programme and then Fundosa evaluates it, scores it and if it deems it adequate, gives its approval.

Regarding the survey, 45% of the training centres stated that they were 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied' with the level of job placement achieved by the trainees. The technicians and managers who participated in the in-depth interviews also pointed out insufficient labour market insertion rates. From the survey, it was found that in 69% of the centres, training 'quite a lot' or 'very much' favours social relationships above labour market insertion. Moreover, 64% of the centres agree 'quite a lot' or 'very much' that training benefits personal and family life. This was also confirmed by the focus group interviews. Similarly, the director of the centre from an NGO noted that courses are not designed according to specific characteristics of the most vulnerable groups, 'because the courses are too long, and for someone who urgently needs a solution to their economic problems, this type of training is in no way adapted to them'.

In this respect, some insights can be noted regarding the discourse of training in terms of labour market insertion. Firstly, these organisations are subject to the economistic discourse found in regulations for vocational training in Spain, which distances organisations from the capability approach. Although some of the representatives interviewed in the training centres were critical of the economistic discourse of training, they have to focus their training activities on the guidelines of the training programmes, which restricts the possibility for more innovative initiatives by the centre (Carvajal 2021b). Secondly, even though most of these organisations are representative of the vulnerable groups targeted by training actions (federations of disabled people, NGOs), these centres are still unable to provide an effective response to the many situations of vulnerability faced by these unemployed people, whether due to disability, low level of education, age (being over 45), immigrant status or other factors.

The Spanish regulations themselves, which coincide with the economic approach of documents and reports on professional training within the European Union, highlight that training must facilitate the insertion of the unemployed into the labour market and must respond to the requirements of business competition (Carvajal 2021a). This would be reasonable if contextual difficulties did not exist, regardless of whether these are internal or external to the individual. Therefore, this discourse is aligned with the human capital approach and is based on principles that promote individualism, which are short-term and focused on paid work. Thus, the objective of training focuses not on protecting people from the market but on preparing them for their insertion into it (Wheelahan and Moodie 2011; Wheelahan et al. 2019; Bonvin 2019; Powell and McGrath 2019b) – though without full recognition of the difficulties of vulnerable groups and the environment. According to this approach, these organisations should prioritise their relationships with businesses (Carvajal 2021b), categorising them into two dimensions: 1) Businesses that are financially supported by the operating programmes of the European Social Fund² in which they participate, complementing the subsidies they receive; and 2) businesses that establish agreements with organisations to arrange work experiences for unemployed students and that, in some cases, promise labour market insertion on temporary contracts.

Organisations, as mentioned above, are also subordinate to the administration in their hierarchical relationships under criteria established in the training programmes (Carvajal 2021b), which reduces the chances of creating innovative initiatives that promote the participation of unemployed groups in both the community and these organisations. These restrictions make it difficult for organisations to adopt changes leading to a type of vocational training that increases the capabilities of both the vulnerable groups and the training centres themselves. Again, it is evident that organisations are fundamental in the stimulation or limitation of opportunities for the most vulnerable groups regarding both improving their well-being capability and giving them a voice or opportunity for expression to individuals (Schröer et al. 2015, 368). In this sense, this study emphasises the importance of agency capability, which is achieved when training centres and the unemployed are given freedom to participate in training course planning. The issue here is that the training centres, due to their own dynamics, are limited to certain actions that inhibit possibilities for the vulnerable unemployed groups and the centres to choose and act on their own. This limits training to temporarily improving the psychosocial well-being of people from vulnerable groups while keeping them in the role of mere passive recipients of benefits and services (Bonvin and Laruffa 2021; López-Fogues 2016).

Therefore, these organisations prioritise the economic dimension of training and neglect the personal and social constraints of vulnerable groups. This aligns with observations made by Bonvin and Orton (2009) regarding the freedom of

choice of the beneficiaries, which is restricted by a top-down public management style that prevents local agents from designing customised interventions and distances them from the capability approach. In addition, in line with the human capital approach, Lima and Guimarães (2015, 246) highlight that training for adults in Portugal emphasises economic competitiveness and productivity, based on the improvement of human capital. However, their results were of little significance for the labour market insertion of the unemployed and suggested that training contributes significantly more to improving self-esteem and a sense of empowerment in these individuals (Lima and Guimarães 2015, 245–246). Consequently, training policies continue to revolve around conventional work linked to labour market constraints, which contrasts with the broader view of work that the capability approach would offer (Bonvin 2012, 2019; Wheelahan and Moodie 2011, 2017; Bonvin and Laruffa 2021; Powell 2021; Powell and McGrath 2019b).

Conclusions and final thoughts

The results confirm that vulnerable groups continue to consider work key to satisfying their material needs, without ignoring the evidence that work also satisfies psychosocial needs. Simultaneously, however, these groups are aware of job instability and the difficulties of insertion in the local labour market. Training courses emerge as temporary opportunities to satisfy basic emotional needs such as belonging to a group, feeling part of a community, creating routines in daily life and being heard by others. This contrasts with the objectives of training centres in Cádiz, which focus on labour market insertion and the promotion of employability possibilities for the unemployed, despite the fact that labour market insertion through these centres is insufficient.

In contrast to the discourse among vulnerable groups, training centres conform to guidelines provided for the training programmes, which prioritise the economic dimension. They follow the human capital approach under a linear understanding of economic development; this limits consideration of the internal and external conversion factors affecting the individuals involved. According to these principles, the unemployed are considered mere recipients of services intended for labour market insertion and are forced to use these measures if they wish to be seen as capable of working. In fact, the design of vocational training lacks the formative programmes and organisational structure that would lead to an active positioning of vulnerable groups within the training centre and the community.

The research also highlighted the important contributions of studies on unemployment and the value of work at the micro level, which address the specific characteristics of the territory and bring us closer to the capabilities approach. As Sen states (Sen 2005, 5): 'human capital theory leads to contextual uncertainty and ignores moral requirements by emphasising the rationality that

characterises choice as a maximisation of self-interest', emphasising generalisations and neglecting the particularities of groups and territories.

The results of this research demonstrate the need for a distinct approach to designing vocational training for vulnerable groups. This also concerns the organisations involved in vocational training and the position of the administration vis-à-vis these organisations and their relations with vulnerable unemployed groups. In order for this shift in training to be effective, changes must occur in the economic development model to include social development. Currently, vocational courses created based on conventional economic development are the dominant model, leading to a training format based on mainstream work and linked to the labour market, and which ignores the singular situations of exclusion faced by the most vulnerable unemployed groups (Bonvin and Laruffa 2021; Powell 2021). Using a broader perspective, in the words of Laruffa (2021),

It could be argued that public action should not focus, mainly, on including people in the market but rather on broadening the perspective, for example, by promoting the 'capability to take care of the world' through a plurality of activities within and outside of labour market.

This may also involve creating a broader definition of what it is to 'be human', surpassing the instrumental view defined by the human capital approach (Bonvin 2019; Schröer et al. 2015; Brown, Lauder, and Cheung 2020).

Notes

1. The Labour Force Survey is a statistical survey designed to capture data on the labour market, which is used to calculate the unemployment rate, as defined by the International Labour Organisation. Website: https://www.ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/es/operacion.htm?c=Estadistica_C&cid=1254736176918&menu=ultiDatos&idp=1254735976595.
2. More information can be found at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=325>.

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