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Launch and online discussion of the study
"The Education – Training – Decent Work Continuum"

INEQUALITIES, EXCLUSIONS AND DISCONTINUITIES: TOWARDS AN EDUCATION-TRAINING-WORK CONTINUUM?

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The current pandemic further highlights the discontinuities between the economic, social and political worlds that the policies, strategies and means implemented for at least two decades were supposed to counteract. Thus, the discontinuities, inconsistencies and tensions between health and economic policies and measures have contributed to the fact that:

- the pandemic is wiping out even the limited reduction of poverty in the North and the South,
- inequalities between individuals, social groups and societies are increasing and
- the resulting exclusions are exacerbating tensions of all kinds.

Moreover, technologies – however advanced they may be and yet presented as the panacea for all current and expected ills – have often reinforced the above phenomena.

A return to 'normal', without a multiplication of discontinuities that are sources of exclusion and inequality, is far from obvious. At the same time, it is not a question of denying the existence of discontinuities between worlds such as those of education, training and work, which will always be in tension – often creative – due to the complementary and contradictory nature of the values, objectives and practices held by the actors in their respective governance. The question is then to define the modes of regulation of the interactions between these three worlds so that this regulation prevents the development/reinforcement of silos, and is carried out for the benefit of the actors who should be the beneficiaries (children, adult citizens-producers-consumers ...).

The problem today is that the devastating effects of the pandemic on:

- education: de-schooling, the adverse effects of educational technologies – presented as a miracle solution – on the quality of the learning process,
- training: disinvestment by companies in the training of young people,
- work: individualisation of the organisation of work to the detriment of collective knowledge,

have been added to the already known effects of the existing discontinuities between the worlds of education, training and work on the most deprived populations. Moreover, these discontinuities are reinforced by top-down modes of technocratic regulation on increasingly segmented and disoriented populations.

These situations highlight the need to (re)construct or reinforce flexible interactions between education, training and work across a Continuum.

Let us recall that the latter is a set of elements such that one can move from one to the other in a continuous way. This notion is not new to the worlds of education, training and work. It emerged in the early 1970s through the adult/permanent/continuous education/training perspectives aimed at linking them with the world of work. The ideological and political domination of the school-based approach as the main vehicle for the implementation of Education for All (MDG 2) since the early 2000s has unfortunately led to the vision of a Continuum based on horizontal, sequential and progressive linearity and temporality between education, training and work.

However, a relative questioning of the school model has appeared over the last ten years, with some toxic effects of this model on young people and adults, particularly the most disadvantaged (school dropouts, NEETs (people not in education, employment or training), illiterate/unskilled adults, etc.). Thus, the fact that two billion children and adults are today "employed" in the informal economy can be explained, among other things, by the compartmentalisation and rigidity of the education/training that was "offered" to them – or that they were unable to benefit from - for their socio-professional integration. These situations contributed to disqualify the vision of the Continuum as presented in the previous paragraph. The 2015-2030 SDG's (No 4 and 8 especially) are expected to bring back on stage the importance of an articulated vision of the worlds of education, training and work. The cases presented in the study (West Africa, South America, Central and Eastern Europe, Switzerland) do, however, point to concrete avenues of development towards decompartmentalization between education, training and work.

Extending the questioning of the school model, the return of interest in Lifelong Learning (LLL) is now presented as another strand of the Continuum's systemic perspective, as the focus of LLL is on the individual. For example, the schooling crisis during the pandemic highlighted the role of families seeking to fill the educational gap for their children internally due to the discontinuity of the school institution. These "learning families", as UNESCO calls them, have created ad hoc bridges between the school and their children, in an intergenerational approach that also makes it possible to limit the discontinuity between ages. Thus, some countries (Uganda, Burkina Faso) call on families to provide literacy training for both children and adults with a view to facilitating the latter's socio-economic (re)integration.

The situation in Geneva, one of the richest cities in the world, is interesting to consider insofar as education and training are now compulsory up to the age of 18 according to the Canton's Constitution. The beginnings of a Continuum are therefore set, since the State must put in place the structures and means to directly link the worlds of education, training and work - a sine qua non condition for making this policy relevant to young people. This necessity is clear in the face of the situation: a) the highest unemployment rate of young people between 25 and 29 years old in Switzerland in May 2021 (too qualified or not qualified enough) and b) about 1500 young people finishing compulsory school in 2019 without any qualification. Faced with this situation, they are offered training-work transition and work-integration programmes/projects, with difficulties related to the labour market and the pandemic.

In any case, the extent of the discontinuities between education, training and work reinforces the processes of exclusion as well as the inequalities of which disadvantaged populations are the objects. This is why we propose a renewed vision of a Continuum that is not based on horizontal, sequential and progressive linearity and temporality between the silos of education, training and work – which are now increasingly working in a largely discontinuous way. Without denying the existence – as we have seen – of 'natural' discontinuities between these three worlds, this new Continuum allows those excluded from one or more of its components to 'travel' between them by acquiring at any time and in any order the knowledge and skills offered by actors in education, training and work. In other words, a Continuum is a strategy to facilitate the (re)integration of marginalised/excluded populations into their socio-economic environment.

This approach implies that the knowledge and qualifications acquired during this "journey" are recognised at the end of each "stopover" at one of the "ports" of the Continuum – this recognition being possible thanks to the existence of "bridges" between the "stopovers". The construction/development of these bridges becomes the first objective, while the Recognition of Prior Learning (Validation of Acquired Experience in French) is the first condition for its success. Given the fact that the parties concerned by this implementation in each of the fields of education, training and work have partly divergent visions, strategies, policies and means, the crucial issue then lies in the coherent, gradual and flexible implementation of governance arrangements involving all the economic and social partners.

Achieving this result can only be achieved through constructive compromises between the logics of education, training and work. It is from this point onwards that the definition of public policies guaranteeing the establishment of a Continuum can be made and then implemented by the public and private stakeholders in the latter, on the basis of organisational, financial and pedagogical modalities that are, if possible, decentralised to the geographical levels and the economic sectors. Such an approach can only be progressive. This is what actors in the humanitarian, peace and development fields are experiencing when faced with tensions and discontinuities between them. The notion of a nexus is used to reflect the minimum amount of continuity required to bring about dynamic change between the three fields. This approach could be suggested for the development of a Continuum.