

## Recent debates on poverty and inequality

*A Special issue in memory of Leonor Vasconcelos Ferreira (1960-2008)*

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SOCIAL INSERTION INCOME: THE CONTRIBUTION  
OF THE ASSOCIATION *QUALIFICAR PARA INCLUIR*

## Social Insertion Income: the contribution of the association *Qualificar para Incluir* towards enhancing this policy

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abstract

resumo / résumé

**Strong constraints limit the potential of the Social Insertion Income (SII) policy to fight the resurgence of material poverty and the current loss of social cohesion. The right to insertion is seriously compromised by the chronic deficit of job opportunities and the withdrawal of the Welfare State. However, by translating scientific knowledge of economic, social and symbolic exclusion into modes of action, it is possible to take advantage of the narrow scope of institutional power that remains in the scope of local intervention. Raising the social and cultural capital of SII beneficiaries in order to reformulate their *habitus* and promoting their return to training in order to acquire an effective asset for their professional and social life are the main axes of the social experiments undertaken by the association *Qualificar para Incluir*.**

Fortes constrangimentos limitam o potencial da política de Rendimento Social de Inserção para combater o ressurgimento da pobreza material e actual perda de coesão social. O direito à inserção é seriamente comprometido pelo crónico défice de oportunidades de emprego e o declínio do Estado-Providência. Todavia, a tradução do conhecimento científico sobre a exclusão económica, social e simbólica em modos de acção permite tirar partido da estreita margem de poder instituinte de que dispõe a intervenção local. A elevação do capital social e cultural dos beneficiários do RSI a fim de reformular o seu *habitus* e o retorno à formação a fim de adquirir trunfos efectivos para a vida profissional e social são os principais eixos da experimentação desenvolvida pela associação *Qualificar para Incluir*.

De fortes contraintes limitent le potentiel des politiques de Revenu Social d'Insertion pour lutter contre la pauvreté matérielle et l'actuelle perte de cohésion sociale. La concrétisation du droit à l'insertion est compromise par le déficit chronique d'emplois et le déclin de l'Etat Providence. Toutefois, la traduction de la connaissance scientifique de l'exclusion économique, sociale et symbolique en modes d'action permet de tirer parti des étroites marges de pouvoir instituant de l'intervention locale. L'élévation du capital social et culturel des titulaires du RSI afin de reformuler leur *habitus* et le retour à la formation comme ressource pour la vie sociale et professionnelle sont les principaux axes du dispositif expérimental mis en oeuvre par l'Association *Qualificar para Incluir*.



## 1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to contribute towards a reflection on the complex theoretical and practical problems that are posed when considering how to overcome the phenomenon of persistent poverty.

Not only does science provide us with the relevant knowledge to understand why poverty arises, but it also gives us significant information about its effects on the individual's psychological and social life. How can we explain, then, why the policies and measures which have been put into practice to date have clearly been inoperative? Is it because they are not coherent with scientifically valid analysis? Is it because there is no political will to fight this social problem? Or because the use of available scientific knowledge on the production of social change, which is still in an early stage of development, is particularly difficult?

The experience gathered through the work undertaken by the association *Qualificar para Incluir* (Qpl), in Oporto, leads us to believe that it is absolutely essential to translate scientific knowledge into intervention programmes. This is particularly important in order to change the behaviour of the social agents who, in a wide range of institutions, contribute towards making poverty a structural phenomenon.

Translating scientific knowledge into intervention programmes is by no means easy because it means that it will be made use of by social agents who are not exclusively professional investigators. In other words, it involves knowledge leaving the tight academic circle. It also involves creating interactions that will stimulate the sharing of scientific knowledge by a large group of social agents. These same agents will also need the necessary persistence to destroy established ways of seeing, analysing and thinking, which are highly resistant to scientific interpretations of the phenomenon of poverty. It is also demanding because it involves confrontation with solidly established world views as well as with vested interests.

Most of the beneficiaries of the SII that the association Qpl monitors, under the protocol of cooperation with Social Security, do not have professional and academic qualifications; nor do they have the motivation to experience work as an activity worth investing in. They no longer seek employment, either due to lack of opportunities or because the work provided offers such low wages that it is economically more rational to turn to available services of social protection and support. In addition to their lack of resources, which they constantly face, their social image and relationships have degraded throughout life, resulting in social detachment.

Hardly any of our unemployed beneficiaries have ever received unemployment subsidies precisely due to the informal nature of the employment relationships in which they have been involved. It has been also impossible for them to save resources in order to cope with unemployment. It is also unlikely to find the necessary support within the family to compensate for the lack of wages.

The beneficiaries accompanied by us have very few opportunities to participate in solidarity networks and above all, they lack the social, cultural, intellectual, ideological and symbolic resources necessary to take part in collective activities which could lead to an improvement in their living conditions. One could say that the exclusion from employment together with the exclusion from sociality, namely in terms of family, consequently resulting in a social and psychological drift, makes their reintegration more difficult. Their life stories are filled with hardships, both at the material and psychological levels. Their current living conditions have determined the internal structuring of certain subjective reactions that tend to contribute, in a way which is very difficult to invert, towards the perpetuation of their inability to ensure survival by their own means. They are mainly individuals who have been faced with material and emotional fractures from an early age. These have led to the development of rationalisations that result in a strong obstacle to overcoming the situation.

Therefore, the mission of the Qpl is to experiment theoretically sustained modes of intervention capable of interrupting either the perpetuation of this poverty in a given generation, or its reproduction in the following generation.

What type of relationship should be established among the people who benefit from SII so that they are not to blame for their dependency? What type of relationship should be established so that, inversely, these same people do not stray towards abandonment and give up on themselves, behaviour that is often mistaken for irresponsibility, lack of civic awareness, parasitism, and so on?

What scope of intervention and influences are achievable by social institutions and professionals who face the appalling housing conditions, especially in terms of subcultures structured around the inversion of values that inflict a heavy discredit on the local environment?

## 2. Objective constraints limiting the scope of the transformative intervention of Social Insertion Income

### 2.1 Structural crisis in employment: exclusion arising from economic factors.

In response to the explosion of structural unemployment in central capitalist countries, *Social Insertion Income*<sup>1</sup> is a social political tool that seeks to mitigate the chronic deficit of decent work opportunities, as well as the exacerbation of social inequalities that are insistently imposed on these societies. The vast literature produced on the changes that have taken place in this part of the world over the last three decades would indicate a return to competitive capitalism.

With it, this has brought about the destruction of the social and political consensus built during the post-World War II era (Sennett, 2006; Grupo de Lisboa, 2002; Fitoussi, 1996; Castel e Laé, 1992; Castel, 1995; 2003; Stiglitz, 2002).

The neo-liberal offensive and the attacks on Keynesianism have given rise, in the intellectual field, to legitimate support for the return to a capitalism which creates fewer jobs and generates more inequalities (Attali, 2004; Bauman, 2007; Farinha, 2009, 2010; Bourdieu, 1998): a capitalism that is less committed to including criteria which are neither economic nor financial, less committed to caring for human beings and for the general common good.

The efforts made to acquire social citizenship, that is, the recognition that social rights have the same practical and legal status that is assigned to property rights, involving the awareness that the citizen is not a mere commodity (Esping-Andersen 1990), have suffered severe blows from the three major motors of the so-called globalisation process: liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation (Grupo de Lisboa, 2002).

The massive movement towards *decommodification* within the welfare state introduced the modern social rights that allowed employees to maintain their standard of living without any connection to the market, through the provision of services that represents a break with the ideology of a submission of politics to the economy. This movement has been seriously eroded under the return of a capitalism that considers economic development to be an end in itself.

The increasing failure of social integration through work is a phenomenon that goes hand in hand with the mass destruction of structures that previously ensured the creation of social bonds truly protective of processes of material, social and symbolic deprivation (Bauman, 1998, 2006; Castells, 1997; Sennett, 1998; Paugam, 2000; Kovacs, 2005).

Technological progress has reached the point where the growth of productivity is inversely proportional to employment. The benefits of productivity offered by automation have allowed manpower to be saved, leaving modern workers faced with the threat of uselessness (Kovacs, 2007; Castells, 1997, 1998).

1. Initially, Guaranteed Minimum Income in Portugal.





Poverty worsens with economic growth, as it is associated with the replacement of stable full-time jobs with short-term contracts, precarious work, job cutbacks and restructuring, which always leads to a decrease in employment.

The inevitable rise of unemployment in developed societies is by no means the result of a temporary dysfunction of the economic system. It raises the reflection on the role of the economy in modern societies, since the way it functions is associated with the re-emergence not only of poverty, but also of social inequality (Atkinson and Piketty, 2007, 2010).

Portugal is characterised by high levels of poverty and inequality. From 2006 to 2008 the Portuguese population living on the poverty line has remained at around 18% (Farinha, 2010, INE, 2010). The distribution of income is one of the most unequal in the EU: in 2006, the wealthiest part of the population enjoyed an income that was 6.5 times higher than that of the poorest<sup>2</sup>. In 2008, the income of the wealthiest 10% of the population was 10.3 times higher than the poorest 10% (INE, 2010). Poverty particularly affects certain subgroups, such as children<sup>3</sup>, the elderly<sup>4</sup>, the unemployed<sup>5</sup>, the jobless<sup>6</sup>, other inactive population<sup>7</sup>, single parents<sup>8</sup>, families with three or more children<sup>9</sup>, people with low wages and low skills.

Within the group of Social Insertion Income beneficiaries included in the Qpl programme (452 domestic groups, corresponding to a total of 1093 individuals), there is a high proportion of young people, since individuals aged between 0 and 24 alone account for almost half the total (49%) and adults whose ages range from 25 to 44 account for 33%<sup>10</sup>. This population is particularly exposed to the risk of cumulative ruptures, affected by multiple vulnerabilities. These can be seen immediately at the level of family ties, since 42% of the domestic groups relate to people who live alone, 25% correspond to single parent families, while the remaining 33% refer to nuclear, extended and reconstituted families.

The low level of education penalises not only the population aged 19 or over, but also minors. As far as adults are concerned, the illiteracy rate is around 8% (despite very few people being aged over 55), those who have completed the first and second cycles of basic education are also represented, with 30% respectively, and adults who have finished the 3rd cycle of basic education account for less than 1/4 of the total. In order to understand how the teaching system negatively influences the acquisition of essential elements for interrupting the reproduction of poverty, we merely have to consider that of the 69 youngsters aged between 15 and 18, only 24 attend the level of schooling expected for that age group (secondary teaching), 6 have not concluded the 2nd cycle, 27 attend the 3rd cycle and 12 have abandoned any kind of training.

The highly precarious relationship of these families with the world of work is clearly illustrated by the fact that only 5.3% of the adults aged between 19 and 64 were involved in a professional activity when they requested SII, while 78% were unemployed. Another relevant indicator for relegation to the most unstable and unqualified segment of the work market lies in the frequency of unemployment in the lives of individuals who once had a professional activity: those who were unemployed 3 to 5 times make up 33% of the total, those who were unemployed 5 times 30%, while fewer than 8% of the beneficiaries had never been in a situation in which they were jobless. It is therefore understood that 3/4 of the families receiving SII depend totally on subsidies (71%)

2. Inequality indicator S80/S20.

3. 22.9% in 2008.

4. 20.1% in 2008.

5. 37% in 2008.

6. 24.4% in 2008.

7. 29.9% in 2008.

8. 38.8% in 2008.

9. 42.8% in 2008.

10. The individuals in the 45 to 54 age group represent 12% of the total and adults over 55 represent no more than 6%.

or family assistance (4%) to ensure their material survival, and that the levels of monetary deprivation are so high that the provision of SII does little to ease this. When we analyse the income and fixed expenses of the families, after the attribution of SII, we see that 82% of the households have an income per head no greater than 150€, while 9% continue to have negative incomes per head, even after receiving SII. With the suppression of complementary supports, initially considered by the measure, the assistance of social services has to be called upon to deal with situations of serious debt caused mainly by housing costs and/or because of expenses arising from poor health.

A non-negligible contingent of the heterogeneous universe of individuals in need of social protection to survive is composed of an urban population living in social housing and other disqualifying areas. They are victims of the cultural uprooting of their parents and their socialisation occurred amongst peers who have also been deprived of institutional frameworks capable of filling the absence of family or one which has difficulty in providing adequate education according to the demands imposed by society's recent developments (Paugam, 2000; Wilson, 1987, 1996).

We are referring to social housing policies that bring about true social fractures, not only due to the fact that they promote the spatial segregation of the poor, but due to the absence of serious investment in social and cultural infrastructures consistently organised to support the families in their educational tasks.

The scarcity of cultural and socio-educational infrastructures in these neighbourhoods is proof of how much the local authorities fail to take responsibility for promoting social cohesion, continuing to put into practice a policy of social housing that is strictly economic in its approach.

In fact, despite vast scientific literature on this subject (Wacquant, 1993; Gans, 1995; Ferreira *et al.*, 1994; Capucha, 2000), the social housing policy that still prevails in this country completely rules out the possibility of giving economically insolvent residents access to sociologically diverse and rich social networks<sup>11</sup>.

On the contrary, municipalities persistently continue to practise the policy of creating ghettos. This only shows how much they compromise the creation of a more cohesive, safe and increasingly inclusive society. Furthermore, the action taken by local politicians often objectively induces social division, which can only make poverty worse and which may often give rise to deviant subcultures.

## **2.2 Social Insertion Income in the context of the Decline and Withdrawal of the Welfare State**

In a context of strong deregulation of the mechanisms that have, to some extent, limited the role of the market in society, the approval of SII is a sign that a wage-based society is undergoing a crisis (Castel, 1995, 2003; Gaulejac *et al.* 1994; Milano, 1989; Paugam, 1993; Rosanvallon, 1995; Adão e Silva, 1998; Guibentif *et al.*, 1997; Hespanha e Carapinheiro, 2002; Rodrigues, 2010).

It denies that the part of the population excluded from work has to be consequently excluded from social interaction. At the same time it acknowledges that it is impossible to disconnect the material means of existence from active participation in society.

In a context of decline of the welfare state and of a deregulated capitalism, it makes sense to question whether this policy only controls poverty, providing for the people involved means that merely maintain the shortcomings on the threshold of the bearable, but that are a long way from promoting decent living conditions. Another possibility is that the SII entails the potential attached to it by the politicians, namely, achieving the right to insertion. Thus, it is important to examine

11. In the city of Oporto, there are approximately 50000 people who reside in social housing neighbourhoods.





the implementation of this policy critically in order to understand to what extent it might be an instrument of resistance to the destruction of social solidarity and the welfare state itself. In this sense, it is necessary to define the obstacles that prevent SII from becoming a means of social development rather than creating great numbers of dependant poor.

In a context that is less favourable to the development of policies that can effectively fight poverty, it is important to take a closer look at the resources mobilised by the Portuguese State, whose social expenses are still significantly lower than those of the 15 older members of the European Union<sup>12</sup>. Observing the incomes provided by the SII policy, our first conclusion is that these are well below the poverty line. Their value is notoriously low, since they were defined with reference to the two minimum benefits that existed under the non-contributory scheme: the social retirement pension and the social disability pension. In fact, the progressive evolution, announced in 2003, to promote the convergence between all social benefits and the value of the national minimum salary did not actually occur. Consequently, this year, the amount received by an adult that lives alone is no greater than 189.52€, which contrasts strongly both with the national minimum salary (475€) and with the relative poverty line, which was 414€ in 2008. In any type of domestic group, the standard of living will always remain far below the official line of poverty<sup>13</sup>.

If we compare the numbers established in other European countries we can, in fact, say that Portugal is among those in which the benefits for minimum income are particularly low, contrasting with others that, despite an undeniable withdrawal of the Welfare State, continue to maintain more protective mechanisms. Compared to SII policies that seek to set the minimum income according to the average standards of living, the Portuguese measure provides no more than a very limited subsistence income (Farinha, 2009).

### 3. The mission of *Qualificar para Incluir*: to prevent the reproduction of inter-generational poverty and encourage social development

#### 3.1 Relationship capable of inducing the reformulation of habitus

Within the framework of constraints we have just shown, the relationship that we seek to build with people is based on a theoretical point of view that perceives poverty as the result of forces that individuals have no opportunity to resist, control and much less escape from. In concrete

12. Estimated as % of the GDP, Portuguese social expenses are still lower than the European average: 20.2% versus 27.8% on the first date and 24.8% versus 26.9% on the second. Estimated in €/person. the distance in relation to the EU-15 average is striking: 3812.3€ versus 7850.9€.

13. Relation between social insertion income and the poverty line (INE, 2008 and Portuguese Social Security, 2009)

Type of family	1. Poverty line	2. SII benefit	1- 2.	SII benefit in % to 1.
1 adult only	414.00 €	189.52 €	224.48 €	45.78
2 adults without children	618.00 €	379.04 €	238.96 €	61.33
1 adult w/1 child under 1 year	538.20 €	379.04 €	159.16 €	70.43
1 adult w/1 child over 1 year	538.20 €	284.28 €	253.92 €	52.82
1 adult w/2 children over 1 year	662.40 €	379.04 €	283.36 €	57.22
1 adult w/3 children over 1 year	786.60 €	511.70 €	274.90 €	65.05
2 adults w/1 child under 1 year	745.20 €	568.56 €	176.64 €	77.80
2 adults w/1 child over 1 year	745.20 €	473.80 €	257.00 €	63.58
2 adults w/2 children, 1 under 1 year and 1 over 1 year	869.40 €	663.32 €	206.08 €	76.30
2 adults w/2 children over 1 year	869.40 €	568.56 €	300.84 €	65.40
2 adults w/ 3 children	993.60 €	701.22 €	292.38 €	70.57

terms, it is supported by a theoretical approach that does not rule out the influence of macro-structural factors, responsible for the production and reproduction of social inequalities. It also benefits from the interactions, namely between professionals and beneficiaries, over the moral degradation of individuals and their precipitation into a condition of poverty.

The type of relationship to establish with the beneficiaries is considered one of the most crucial tools in achieving the more or less distant goal of social inclusion. Investing in the relationship with people is of the utmost importance in order to reverse the processes of mortification of the self (Goffman, 1968) and to promote the rebuilding of personal history so that the individual can be liberated from feelings of inferiority and disbelief. Therefore, the type of intervention that we propose has nothing to do with feelings of mercy or compassion. Treating people as subjects with rights and duties forces us to act as agents that facilitate the appropriation of a critical interpretation of the social processes that lead to poverty and determine the construction of the individual. It forces us to work in order for them to appropriate the knowledge and provide a kind of training that will allow them to negotiate and challenge the labels that are given to them.

The relationship we want to test implies that we adopt a comprehensive attitude (Gaulejac, 1994; Bauman, 1998; Gans, 1995), which is to say an epistemological break from the stereotypes in which we categorise all conduct of the poor as a sign of lack of character and treat them with the harshness and lack of consideration designed for those who deviate from the norm. The relationship we want to establish requires a long process of intermediation in which the essential part of our role is to provide the knowledge of the objective constraints that regulate social organisation, in its different fields and contexts, so that the individuals can effectively decide what is best for them. To break away from the unilateral relationship that grants institutional agents the power to impose on those who need the meagre financial aid in order to survive, imposing chores in which they did not choose to participate, is a core objective in order to remove the beneficiaries from the terrible social disregard to which they are subjected (Bréban, 1984; Gaulejac *et al.*, 1994).

To remove the individuals from the symbolic devaluation, or the feelings of inferiority and guilt they have for themselves, is a necessary condition to trigger awareness of the paths, although narrow and painful, that may lead to some freedom. The theses that pointed out the emergence of a poverty culture (Lewis, 1966; 1970), born from constraints that destroy any hope of some day being able to escape from the situation, are a precious tool in helping to avoid the trap of interpreting the manifestations of that culture as the cause of poverty. They are decisive in avoiding the misinterpretation that the problem stems from the apparent lack of ambition, the apparent lack of effort to escape from the situation, the apparent lack of motivation to work, the apparent resistance in returning to school, in short, the apparent disinterest in projecting the future. The apparent resignation of the poor should be interpreted as an effect and not as a cause. An effect that retroacts on the original causes and reinforces them, contributing to giving poverty the nature of an irreversible process, given the harmful interaction that occurs between cause and effect.

In reality, the intersection between various theoretical perspectives that have been given on poverty is crucial so as not to be misled into simplistic views, including those that lead to a romantic and naive view about those who constantly endure poverty. Indeed, we can deduce from this intersection of theories that certain conditions of existence, which are miserable, not only in terms of the scarcity of material goods but also relative to the lack of social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Gaulejac, 1994; Almeida *et al.*, 1992; Capucha, 2005), can produce forms of psychological reaction and specific states of consciousness which, retroacting on external factors, end up reinforcing their action, giving it the nature of a process that self-reproduces itself from generation to generation. If we do so, we will not be tempted to label individuals.

If we come to understand that the production of cultures, close to what Oscar Lewis defined as a poverty subculture, is a result of a severe chain of restrictions, and that the subjective structures inherent to this subculture are forms of psychological adaptation to these painful circumstances,







then we will know how to control the tendency to judge the behaviour of the poor and with them engage in the reformulation of their own rationalisations towards their experienced failures (Bourdieu, 1993).

Therefore, we cannot fail to emphasise that the goal of establishing an emancipating relationship with the beneficiaries is burdened with difficulties, and sometimes conflicts, which we have to manage. To do so, we must make use of a mixture of scientific knowledge, sensitivity, personal maturity, civic involvement and political positioning with respect to the production of inequality.

If we take into account that the most profoundly destructive effects of poverty are more closely related to the symbolic and relational scarcity than to the material, that is, to the way poverty is constructed in a society driven by consumerism, we soon understand that the investment in the rebuilding of a more heterogeneous relational fabric, structured by relations that restore a sense of dignity and self-worth, is an indispensable way to generate the reconstruction of the *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984). By this we mean the system of logical schemes and principles that are part of culture and guide the choices of the individuals whose lives have been devastated by poverty.

From this sociological approach to the practice, we maintain that the main guiding principle of intervention should entail the sharing of knowledge which, as Paulo Freire proposed (Seguier and Garibay, 2009; Freire, 1970; 1973), provides the poor with the ability to dismantle the incessantly hidden mechanisms that are the cause of modern exclusion, not only due to the action of external forces, but also because of the way they adapt to their hardships. What is important is to construct, with the individuals, an analysis of poverty and the paths which, though limited, may contribute towards their (re)gaining the dignity that has been lost or never achieved. To understand what causes unemployment and poverty, as well as deconstructing the current discourses which are disseminated about them, is a path that should preferably be taken with the citizens that benefit from the SII, if we take into account that their social emancipation requires a clear demonstration of their ability to negotiate labels (Goffman, 1968; Gaulejac, 1994). However, the purpose of this perspective is not to focus everything on the actions of the most powerful, resulting in an absolute lack of accountability on the part of the individuals. Investing in building a critical consciousness, to take an expression by Paulo Freire (Freire, 1970), is a necessary condition to free the relationship between professionals and beneficiaries from romantic, paternalistic or moralistic contaminations that lead to the perpetuation of the situation. We consider it to be extremely relevant to break away from shallow or hypocritical statements that consider work ethics as an effective and indispensable remedy for the threat of poverty (Bauman, 1998). To achieve liberation from labels that heavily corrode self-image, we need to deconstruct the motives behind the idea that the conditions offered by this policy must be reduced to a minimum in order to prevent the individuals from becoming dependant on the subsidies, an idea which is firmly established in public opinion. Above all, it is necessary to change institutional workings that prevent the achievement of essential and authentic cultural resources.

### **3.2 Creating opportunities to gain assets that will lead to an economically active life**

It is this conviction that leads to our decision that the training of individuals is the central domain of the insertion project that must be contracted between the SII beneficiaries and the social services. The problem is by no means simple as the opportunities are scarce for these beneficiaries to return to training and consequently take possession of an effective asset for professional life. To increase these opportunities, the Qpl works hard at structuring a network of teaching and professional training institutions according to an innovative view, clearly different to the bureaucratic procedures that are responsible for the educational exclusion of many individuals. Together with these organisations, it seeks to build a progressively more solid consensus on the reasons that are behind the negative relationship that the school has with these individuals, as well as with regard to the organisation of training programmes and the most adequate training methods for the cultural universe of the trainees. For the leaders of schools and training centres, which we try to select according to the openings on the job market, we



propose sharing the critical analysis which gives the functioning of the training institutions a responsibility in school dropout and failure. It is essential to review the theses that analyse the opportunities of access to formal education (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964, 1970; Lahire, 1993, 1995, 2008) in order to demonstrate that a lot of the evil that we see in schools derives from its own internal operations, as a result of taking on excessively bureaucratic definitions of the role of the student and the tutor, as well as excessively simplistic definitions of what teaching and learning consist of.

However, the proposals we make towards the necessary reform of teaching practices have nothing to do with defending a reduction in the quality and demands of education, which, although it is a trend strongly present in Portuguese educational institutions, is one of the most perverse forms of elimination.

One of the greatest difficulties with regard to the expansion of opportunities of these individuals is to convince the leaders and professionals from education institutions to open themselves to experimentation of methods of teaching/learning, not only appropriate to the culture in which the trainees were initially socialised, but which also assume relevant theoretical knowledge about the phenomenon of learning, and in particular on the learning of competences (Perrenoud, 1997; Rychen *et al.*, 2001). Those who, like us, do not merely refer these people to schools and professional training centres, nor resign themselves to following the training process day by day, to listening to the difficulties, the frustrations, the discouragements and the joys of the individuals that accept training as part of their insertion project, know that the obstacles are powerful. Those who, like us, follow the trainees daily in their learning context can observe how difficult it is for the tutors to understand the problems, ways of thinking, being and doing of these trainees. Those who, like us, are in the classroom on a daily basis and witness the selected content first-hand, the ways it is handled, the interaction between tutors and trainees, their processes of communication, the value tutors attribute to knowledge, will realise, more often than not, that there are practices that destroy the interest for knowledge, cancel the creativity and the intelligence of the trainees and induce processes of true distancing between the representations of reality and reality itself (Bonnéry, 2007; Novak and Gowin, 1984).

Our direct relationship with these institutional contexts allows us to observe that there are very few tutors prepared to harness knowledge towards solving problems in contexts of real life, or open to critical thinking and pedagogical innovation. It should be noted that in the case of the beneficiaries in question, their school did not represent an opportunity to acquire basic skills, such as speaking fluently, reading, interpreting and writing, or solving basic arithmetic. Therefore, it is of great importance to restore the basic learning from which learning of a higher level derives. It is also crucial to abandon stereotyped programmes which were designed without taking into consideration previous learning and the pupils' social and cultural reality. Our intervention in the schools, as participants of the pedagogical team allocated to each class, allows us to highlight another mechanism that leads to the exclusion of access to culture and knowledge: the trivialisation of school work and the granting of certificates that do not correspond to real knowledge.

To expand the opportunities of adults and youth that are enrolled in professional training courses<sup>14</sup>, it is necessary to fight over ideas and practices that delude them, making them

14. In the academic year of 2009-10, Qpl organised and supervised in the field the training of 168 adult beneficiaries, distributed over literacy courses (44), EFA B2 General (41), EFA B3 Installing and Repairing Computers (16), EFA Secondary Site Manager (14), EFA B3 Electricity (17), EFA B3 Machine Driver (11), EFA B3 Plumber (11), EFA B3 Kitchen (14) EFA Secondary Electronics (24). We also organised and supervised courses for young adolescents (total of 88): Professional Course in Electronics, Automation and Commands – 12<sup>th</sup> year (11), Professional Drawing, Measuring and Site Preparation Course, 11<sup>th</sup> year (15), Professional Course in Health and Safety – 11<sup>th</sup> year (16), Professional Course in Electronics – 10<sup>th</sup> year (12), Course for Training in Installation and Repairing of Computers – 9<sup>th</sup> year (10), Course for Training in Computer Assisted Drawing/Autocad – 8<sup>th</sup> year (14).



believe that their diploma is valuable regardless of the knowledge they acquire and is guaranteed just by enrolling.

One of the obstacles mentioned above is precisely the supply of low quality training, as a clear demonstration of the low expectations of the tutors towards the trainees and how the interactions that the former are willing to engage in with the latter result in a mechanism that is an impediment to their cultural evolution.

Another process that encourages the abandonment and the death of the motivation to invest in education is the terrible resistance tutors have towards learning through competences. This statement may at first seem unfair, given the prevalence of the word competence in the syllabuses of adult training, and likewise, given the formality of competences that exist in the evaluation grids that are institutionally established. But, what happens is that the concept of competence is interpreted in a way that distorts and trivialises its meaning. Those who, like us, strive to create objective external conditions, which is to say, a relational framework where the most fortunate dedicate themselves to the evolution of those who could not even obtain basic knowledge, or the mental strength to believe in themselves, are confronted with strong resistance from many teaching professionals. In order to overcome this resistance, the professionals whose mission is to establish a project of insertion with the beneficiaries must have the knowledge and ability to contend in order to defy stereotypes and profoundly internalised representations in the school environment and in the professional training itself (Perrenoud, 2010).

Inverting the processes of exclusion of those who are less favoured certainly involves the denial of values and behaviours of resignation and a commitment towards the search for solutions to the serious problems that involve production, the organisation of work, unemployment and education in our society. With this idea, we wish to demonstrate that it is possible to reconcile the outcasts of the educational system, the young and not so young, with knowledge; that it is possible to prevent a definite fatalistic resignation from falling upon them; that, last but not least, it is possible to pull them from their disbelief in themselves.

How can we demonstrate that the reproduction of poverty is not a fatality?

While it is true that knowledge brings us dignity and that this is a primary need for all beings, it is no less true that many of the beneficiaries are not convinced that they can evolve in this way. On the other hand, the road is long, requiring strenuous effort, and is so much more difficult to bear when their daily life is filled with frustrations, discomfort and deprivation of the many small pleasures that allow us to recover the necessary energy to face our obstacles.

A substantial part of Qpl experimentation involves influencing the leaders of training institutions, in order to divulge and put into practice the important approaches of Perrenoud (Perrenoud, 1997) on teaching through skills. As we do not have room in this paper to describe the proposals that we assume from this author, we conclude with an idea that we think synthesises the experimental programme of intervention to whose practice we are committed: extracting the day-to-day of individuals from the emptiness of relations, activities, interests, references, connections and objectives does not eliminate material poverty in the short run, but does allow us to invert the moral degradation that annihilates the possibility of the poor taking ownership of their own history.

#### 4. Conclusion

One of the innovations introduced by the SII consists of bringing into the same category all those who have traditionally depended on social support and the new poor generated by the decomposition of the job market. It also aspires to be more than a simple right to relief, more than a simple mandatory distribution of subsidies. SII was associated with a legislative intent to programme reinsertion. To do so, an organised mobilisation was expected of a range of organisations and professionals whose actions are usually defined by a relatively strict division of

labour. However, experience in the practice of implementing this policy raises many questions as to the meaning given to the term insertion.

Does it mean integration in a strong relational affiliation and, in the medium term, in a stable job?

An obvious conclusion for those who interpret poverty without being dominated by determinism is the weak investment, dedicated to obtaining the necessary resources for the task of integration, truly worthy of its name.

What direct and extended observation in the field has shown is that it is not enough to legally bind the obligation to work in a partnership in order to create a methodology of intervention based on the cooperation of efforts and resources and, above all, capable of breaking the bureaucratic ways of solving problems. The rhetoric of intervention anchored in partnerships does not, on its own, generate the necessary interaction of various institutional representatives

In fact, what we experienced is that the local insertion units are dominated by a bureaucratic orientation. Consequently, the prescribed solutions for those who experience the most serious poverty prove to be a joke, namely because of the shortage and misery inherent in the available models of training. Certainly, the return of these people to education, with the goal of truly achieving their social integration, would require a profound examination of the concepts and practices institutionalised in the field of education, would require an intense involvement and investment in relations. The variety and severity of the difficulties that affect(ed) the lives of these kind of poor cannot be overcome if the means provided are insufficient given the magnitude and perversity of the problems that constrain their lives. They will not be overcome if, from the start, you claim that there is nothing else you can do besides fill time, through purely occupational activities.

In order for local insertion units to become effective instruments of promotion of social integration, it would be necessary to embrace a theoretical framework that could integrate the different dimensions involved in the emergence of the social vulnerability that defines persistent poverty. Only then will the desired mobilisation of community resources cease to be confined to the mere inventory of what exists, confirming the scarcity of available resources. Without denying the importance of the shortage of material means<sup>15</sup> as limiting obstacles for intervention, it seems reasonable to assert that the existing resources, namely human resources, could be more efficient if the different types of professionals engaged in sharing and divulging scientifically-based modes of observation and intervention.

If we uncritically and submissively accept the existing supply in a given territory, without questioning the logic and unadjusted models of education that tend to prevail in these institutions, this would destroy the innovative potential of the SII removing any effectiveness as a tool capable of provoking the process of insertion; it corresponds to reducing it to a bureaucratic application of false solutions that only contribute to the management of misery.

Although there are many studies that shed light on the importance of connecting education to day-to-day problems and the knowledge that these raise, the reality is that, even in the field of professional training, ways of teaching that establish a profound discouragement for the return

15. Another revealing aspect of the incoherence of the local insertion units in guaranteeing the access to fundamental rights for all citizens is the inexistence of consistent actions concerning the conditions of housing. Despite the innovating intentions that underlie the design of this measure, the truth is that the presence of representatives of local municipalities in these commissions does not represent effective cooperation in terms of meeting the housing needs.

As in the case of training, this topic requires the internalisation of the studies produced in the field of urban sociology, which allow us to understand that housing is not limited to material aspects, such as a roof, running water, electricity, sewage system, number of rooms. There are certain underlying logics to the ways of occupying territory with devastating consequences with respect to the distribution of two crucial resources for social inclusion: the networks of social relations; the access to dignity and to symbolic value.





to a training project continue to prevail. This partnership would require intense involvement and interaction of the partners with the educational institutions, the negotiation of the adequate teaching conditions, presenting proposals based on important theories that have been developed regarding adult training and reformulation of the *habitus*, namely when internalised in successive years of aimless drifting. All the partners would work together in order to translate into action their continuous and shared reflection on the conditions they have to create in order to trigger internal change, to trigger attitudes compatible with a way out of the situation of poverty.

It is therefore relevant that we question ourselves on the notion of an insertion contract that is at stake here, as well as the notion of insertion. Could this be merely a panacea?

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