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TOWARD A "CAPABILITY" ANALYTICAL MODEL OF PUBLIC POLICY? LESSONS FROM ACADEMIC  
GUIDANCE ISSUES

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**Keywords: Sen, Capability, Justice, Fairness.**

**Abstract:** Often designated the Capability Approach, the analytical framework we present here emphasizes the effective capability of individuals to accomplish their projects and the ways in which public action enables this real capability. To calibrate public action in terms of individual capability, the economist Amartya Sen has devised a system based on the distinction between "functioning", which are what individuals effectively achieve and "capabilities", which depend on real freedom in individual behaviour. To incorporate the role of politics more directly, a second distinction is made between the *resources (commodities)* and *capabilities* of individuals. Resources consist of the goods and services which people have at their disposal, whether they are distributed through the political, economic, or social system. Nonetheless, as everyone knows, equal resources correspond to individual *capabilities* that are completely unequal. To measure this degree of inequality, Sen proposes the "conversion factor" which consists of the actual ability of a person to transform his resources into individual *capabilities*.

The Capability Approach provides an analytical framework to assess and explain a huge part of public policies (in)efficiency within policy subsystems. Without the adequate conversion factors, public policies risk two pitfalls: offering freedom that is only formal; and requiring "compliant" behaviour without an equitable distribution of the ability to comply. In this case, allocated resources remain untapped and hence useless.

To illustrate the relevance of this model and demonstrate the generic dimension of this approach, we give a series of examples based on academic guidance issues.

## **Introduction**

Studying public policies implies to address questions about specific dimensions of policies, such as agenda setting, policy dynamics, policy discourse, policymaking, policy impact or policy evaluation. We define models of public policies as patterns of descriptive concepts and explicative hypotheses about one or several dimension of a policy. Our objective in this paper is to show that the capability approach (CA) can be a relevant model in the field of policy evaluation. However, contrary to many models used to make ex post assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of public programs, we assume that CA can provide us with a strictly analytical model without any normative dimension. This perspective may seem surprising since many debates about Amartya Sen's approach deal with its normative feature. We would like to focus on the analytical toolbox that is at the core of the CA. Resources (commodities), capabilities, functionings, conversion factors and choices are the five concepts that describe the basic process. Through this general schema we can evaluate policies without referring to any subjective theory of justice. Then the question is why people don't behave the way policymakers want them to? Why don't they use the resources at their disposal? This kind of evaluation goes far beyond a mere account of quantitative data about actual and potential beneficiaries. CA as we use it in the field of academic guidance focuses much more on the process than on the output.

We begin this paper with a general presentation of CA and its conceptual toolbox. We then present the French academic guidance system. Finally we apply the CA model to our study case to illustrate how relevant it may be for policy evaluation.

### ***The capability approach toolbox: five concepts for a process analysis***

The difficulties to operationalize the CA have been discussed many times. As Chiappero Martinetti argued,

“ Undoubtedly, the richness of such theoretical argumentation is not easy to translate into practical terms. The Capability Approach is certainly more demanding at an informational and methodological level if compared with more standard approaches (i.e. income or opulence-centred analysis) to well-being; it is also hard to constrain and to

manage in the traditional framework of welfare and poverty analysis, if we want to preserve its informative and interpretative contents. These difficulties could easily explain why, up to now, there are relatively few empirical applications that have been able to capture the richness of such a perspective even if many well-being analyses refer to it.” (2000:3)

Sen has not proposed only a new philosophical perspective (1992:11), he addressed these questions of operationalization. To him, “this approach must nevertheless be practical in the sense of being usable for actual assessments of the living standards” (1987:20). Sen (1985, 1998) and Sen and Drèze (1989, 1997) even made analyses of mortality or hunger based on extensive empirical work. However many questions remain difficult and scholars still discuss about the capability of the CA to be really operationalized (Sugden 1993, Srinivasan 1994) or about the way to do it (Alkire 1998, Klasen 2000, Robeyns 2005a, 2005b, Comin 2001, Zimmermann 2006)

Most of these debates are about the normative dimension of the CA. Sen’s objective is to assess standards of living, poverty, welfare or justice through a set of indicators (the informational basis) wider than utilities, primary rights or goods. What Sen focuses on is not resources but functionings, i.e. doings and beings. To evaluate justice or well-being, we have to look at what people can really do or be. Individuals’ capabilities are their abilities to do or to be what they want and what they have reason to aim at. Reasonability is socially defined. Then the question is what are the capabilities to be measured ? What are the basic fonctionnings individuals should be able of ? How can we choose them, on what criteria and who is allowed to do this selection ?

We think that most part of these difficulties are connected to the normative dimension of the CA. There are two ways of following a normative perspective within the CA. Either scholars look for the good capabilities to measure, i.e. the ones that they deduce from their own theory of justice, or they search which ones are socially defined as the good capabilities. In the first case, normative means “prescriptive”. In the second case, normative means “referred to a set of values objectively established by the analysis”. We find that this second case is actually strictly analytical because the criteria of the assessment is given by an objective empirical research. But this

way of using the CA remains discussed because of the methodological difficulties to study capabilities that are socially valued.

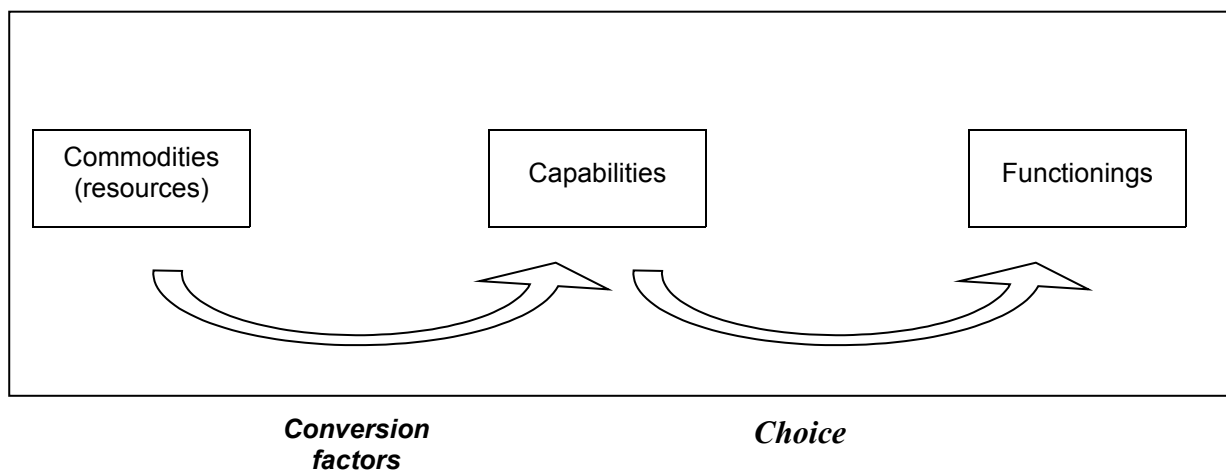
Many scholars who use CA focus on the link between functionings and capabilities. They wonder whether individuals who want to live a certain way (a functioning, that seems reasonable), really have the capacity to do it or not. We would concentrate rather on the link between commodities (resources) and capabilities, studying whether individuals are really able to use the resources public policies give to them, or not. In both cases, real freedom is the aim of the analysis. Are people really free to live the life they want ? Are individuals really able to use the commodities that are supposed to make them free ? As our objective is to assess the relevance of CA as an analytical schema for public policies evaluation, the second question is more central.

The analytical framework we present here emphasizes the effective capability of individuals to accomplish their projects and the ways in which public action enables this real capability. To calibrate public action in terms of individual capability, Amartya Sen first makes a distinction between "functioning", which are what individuals effectively achieve and "capabilities", which depend on real freedom in individual behaviour. Thus the fact of not eating (as functioning) could be considered as an individual's choice to fast or as an actual constraint (famine), revealed by the notion of *capability*. The same action can thus call into play completely different spaces of individual freedom. What matters then is to apprehend exactly what real *capabilities* individuals have, and base public action on these, rather than on *functioning*, i.e., the actions expected of individuals. More precisely, A. Sen insists on the need to connect these two dimensions.

To incorporate the role of politics more directly, a second distinction is made between the *resources* and *capabilities* of individuals. Resources consist of the goods and services which people have at their disposal, whether they are distributed through the political, economic or social system (rights, income, solidarity, etc.). Nonetheless, as everyone knows, equal resources correspond to individual *capabilities* that are completely unequal. To measure this degree of inequality, Sen proposes the "*conversion factor*" which consists of the actual ability of a person to transform her resources into individual *capabilities*.

To illustrate the notion of "*conversion factor*", Sen and his disciples frequently use the example of riding a bicycle, making an analytical distinction between *individual conversion factors* (individual ability to ride a bike, disability), *social conversion*

*factors* (social norms permitting or forbidding riding a bike, caste of untouchables) and *environmental conversion factors* (infrastructure, roads, spare parts). In the absence of adequate *conversion factors*, *resources* could remain purely formal rights and perpetuate inequalities. Public action must intervene in these different scenarios and propose *resources* to individuals by simultaneously ensuring individual, social and environmental *conversion factors*. Without adequate factors of these kinds, public policies risk two pitfalls: offering freedom that is only formal; and requiring “compliant” behaviour without an equitable distribution of the ability to comply. Public action in this case is characterised by a form of paradoxical injunction encouraging individual responsibility in the framework of behaviour that conforms to social and legal norms, but leaving aside the question of the actual capability of individuals to comply.



**Figure 1 - the CA analytical toolbox**

The analytical model provided by the CA to evaluate public policies focuses on the process explaining why an individual doesn't behave the way policymakers expect her to. Three hypotheses have to be studied: commodities are not sufficient or not well adapted; individuals don't have the capacity to use the resource because of a lack of conversion factors; expected behaviours don't occur because individuals don't want to. Therefore this kind of evaluation is not based on any reference to subjective values or to any societal theory of justice. The only external information needed are about the expected behaviour, which is generally explicit in the formulation of the policy, and the capabilities needed to use the resources. This latter point is bound to the kind

of resource. If the resource is made of rights, or of public transports or of free language lessons, capabilities and conversion factors will be completely different. As a consequence, there is no possibility to draw *a priori* a list of capabilities. In Sen's perspective, this list just has to be as wide as possible, encompassing both internal (cognitive) and external capabilities. Thus, before to use the CA to assess a public policy, we need first to know the objective of the policy (the expected functionings), the public and the resources given and second to describe precisely the players, their interactions and the role of the environment for each of them. When we know all these information, we can study resources, conversion factors, capabilities and choices in the explanation of the fonctionnings.

### **A case of policy evaluation: the guidance system**

***Guidance has been a subject of study and debate for a relatively long time now (Naville, 1945) and, in the last twenty-five years or so, has seen renewed interest. Guidance is now given a pre-eminent position on the political agenda of the State and local authorities in France, even though this has fluctuated over the course of time.***

***Initially conceived as a flow management tool central to the education system, during the 1970s, career guidance developed into a "model" that was to become widely used outside the world of education. This trend developed mainly in response to the need to regulate the labour market, at a time when the issue of finding jobs for a limited low-skilled workforce, in terms of numbers, has become a prime concern, in parallel to immigration issues.***

***Over the last ten years, changes in the scope and the function of career guidance seem to be aligned to the changing requirements of a new context, predominated, a contrario, by increasingly higher levels of qualification attained by individuals at the same time as increasing job scarcity. Here, guidance counselling and advice on drawing up a career development plan seem to have been replaced by "career education programmes" according to Hénoque and Legrand (2004). Its objectives converge first toward "the individual's personal development, steering pupils to follow existing training streams and encouraging social integration", and second, toward the***

***"developing flexibility among the workforce" (Guichard, 2001, p. 59), formulated by other authors more succinctly in terms of adaptability.***

***This combination of new trends changes the position of guidance as a subject and vehicle for public action. First of all, guidance is now seen as an instrument used for the purposes of adaptation and support through transitions in the labour market or within training programmes. Seen from this angle, the obligation (2002) for employers to update their employees' skills to changing job requirements seems to indicate a new way of "extending" career guidance issues, which, in this case, operates within the company.***

***Guidance then takes on new goals, such as being prepared for the unexpected and the risk of job insecurity, thanks to the development of more secure career pathways.***

***Lastly, guidance counselling is once more in the spotlight due to the problem of integrating young people. The French public authorities have recently, at the time of urban rioting in November 2006, re-asserted the existence of a strong link between academic failure and social integration problems. Is difficulty in integrating a sign of an ineffective education system and the failure of the guidance process? This question thus once again throws the spotlight on the role of school guidance and vocational guidance.***

Nonetheless, guidance is not simply a matter of individual choice and free will; these choices come within and are taken within institutionally-restricted frameworks. The influence of the determining factors to which they give rise and which influence individual decisions implies that we must pay particular attention to the processes and workings of the guidance system.

***As the interface tasked with reconciling the individual's aspirations, regulating the education system and meeting labour demand for the production system, the career guidance system is thus directly connected to public action. Mediated by public institutions or by the guidance professionals, who have their own ethical systems, these principles of collective action come up against and generate adjustments in individual choices. Also, insofar as employers are concerned, qualifications are still seen as strong evidence of skills. As for the users - young people and adults alike, the attractiveness of a training or academic course is assessed on the***



***basis of various criteria: the image and social prestige of a profession, the possibility of pursuing studies to a higher level upon attaining a particular diploma, together, nonetheless, with the eventual necessity of entering the labour market. It is within this web of conflicting demands that the guidance system is organised.***

***We analyse the guidance system on the basis of an extensive definition of the concept of a system. By guidance system, we mean a group of players and functions exercised, with a view to assisting in the educational or vocational choices of individuals without reference to a specific organisational model and without managing to erase the differences, divides, dissensions or failures that may characterise this system.***

#### **PRESENTATION OF SOURCES**

***This article draws on the results of recent surveys carried out by the CEREQ on school and vocational guidance, including the following:***

- "Valeur du diplôme : place et rôle dans les parcours scolaires et professionnels", Yvette Grelet, Claudine Romani (Coord), final report drawn up for the DGESCO (the Schools Directorate for the French Ministry of Education), CEREQ, November 2007, 342p.
- "Les pratiques locales d'orientation en Dordogne", Thierry Berthet, Clément Costanza, Stéphanie Dechezelles, Rodolphe Gouin and Véronique Simon, Report submitted to the Aquitaine Regional Council, Spirit, March 2008, 246p.
- NEF No.32 "Choix d'orientation et logiques institutionnelles", Gérard Boudesseul and Yvette Grelet; NEF No.33 "Orientation: quels repères pour trouver son chemin ? Survey of 2,600 young people in school", Gérard Boudesseul in conjunction with Cyril Coinaud, Yvette Grelet and Céline Vivent
- NEF No.35 "Les acteurs locaux de l'orientation : un exemple aquitain", Thierry Berthet (coord), Stéphanie Dechezelles, Rodolphe Gouin and Véronique Simon.
- NEF No.34 "Orientation : la parole aux élèves", Thierry Berthet (coord), Stéphanie Dechezelles, Rodolphe Gouin and Véronique Simon.
- ***"Les choix d'orientation à l'épreuve du temps", Thierry Berthet, Isabelle Borrás, Gérard Boudesseul,, Cyril Coinaud Yvette Grelet, Agnès Legay,***

***The forces at play described here between individual career choices and the social and institutional framework within which they are developed calls for a conceptual framework able to provide useful solutions for the players involved in this system. This is analysed in the fourth section of the report, which draws on Amartya Sen's "capabilities approach" for conceiving ways to deal with this conflict inherent in the career guidance system.***

## **A system centred on the career decision**

### **Prior to taking the decision, the request for guidance must be made**

Guidance counselling is a series of interactions and the guidance system consists of the configurations of players between whom these interactions take place. By definition, any interaction presupposes the initial movement of one term in the relation toward a second term, followed by a movement in return toward the first term, etc. Here, we analyse this process of "action and reaction" from the point of view of the user. The process involved is therefore that of self-guidance or receiving guidance, rather than providing guidance.

From the point of view of the user, making a request for guidance is a step prior to the decision itself. In this process, an important distinction should be made between the status and the behaviour of the person requesting guidance. Some people do not display the behaviour of a person making a request, in other words, they do not actively seek guidance but nonetheless receive the information, advice or decision due solely to their status. This implies that the institutions to which they are attached, in accordance with the law or regulations, are under an obligation to provide this guidance service. For example, this is the case of young people who are in compulsory education or have just left school and who, even if they are not actively seeking guidance, may be offered the chance to register with an organisation, make an appointment with an Information and Guidance Centre (CIO) or the school support unit for keeping young people at risk in education (PRI, *Pôle Relais Insertion*), etc. On the other hand, other people who do not have this status of a person making the request – young people in school, or registered with an ANPE National Employment Agency, for example – genuinely seek guidance, in the form of information, advice or

a decision. Thus, the request may be voluntary, or simply the result of the individual's status, i.e. since the service providers are under an obligation to produce the decision regarding this individual.

The request is always a request for information, advice or a decision<sup>1</sup>. The same applies to the service provided. Nonetheless, the three areas are interrelated. They need to be understood in terms of their institutional aspects - as subject to the law, to legal and administrative regulations, for instance - and also in terms of their informal, non-institutionalised aspects. Thus, the events in the guidance process do not solely occur according to the conditions expected or desired by the institutions. Moreover, it sometimes seems to be the case that events that are not expected by the latter have the greatest influence on the individual's decision to seek guidance. In the case of institutionalised events, this would involve, for example, compulsory interviews, regulated and monitored consultations within the framework of rights or obligations, or administrative decisions in response to a request or to a situation; in the case of non-institutionalised events, this would involve, for example, meeting up with friends, discussions with one's family or reading the news, etc.

These guidance events pits together players who then adopt different types of behaviour. Thus, at an open day held in a school or an information meeting at the national employment agency (ANPE), some people are active, interested and dynamic, while others are passive or indifferent. Another example: faced with a requirement to find work experience or a training programme (event), the individual may respond with a sincere commitment (satisfaction), remote obedience (indifference), or according to the typology described by Albert Hirschmann (Hirschman,1970) with behaviour such as *loyalty* (accepts playing the expected role, possibly in spite of personal dissatisfaction or suppressed disagreement), *voice* (participation or obedience but expresses disagreement or dissatisfaction), or *exit* (refusal to participate or obey). Such behaviour is usually manifested either through involvement - the individual assumes the *role* of requestor, beyond his/her *status* - or through indifference.

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<sup>1</sup> Although it may seem paradoxical, the notion of a request for a decision may refer to several different concrete cases. For example, an individual may contact an agent specialising in guidance to take a decision on his or her behalf where s/he is unable to make this decision himself/herself. Similarly, a person may request a decision regarding the path to take for reasons related to a change in his/her status, for example, related to unemployment benefits. Lastly, this may also refer to cases where the final decision is not up to the beneficiary but where his or her request (desire) is taken into account in making this decision. A voluntary initiative may thus be more or less obligatory, hence the advantage of factoring in (cf. below) the intensity of the constraints on the individual in the guidance process.

The processes that can be integrated in an analysis of the guidance system may thus be extremely varied insofar as regards target population categories and the type of constraint entailed, as illustrated in the scenarios described in the tables below.

Table 1

GUIDANCE PROCESS ACCORDING TO TYPE OF USER

	SCHOOL USERS		JOBSEEKERS		EMPLOYEES-PROFESSIONALS	
	Institutionalised	Non-institutionalised	Institutionalised	Non-institutionalised	Institutionalised	Non-institutionalised
EVENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-classroom hours</li> <li>-"Découverte professionnelle" (introduction to working life) option</li> <li>-individual interview with a guidance counsellor/psychologist (COP)</li> <li>-progress sheets</li> <li>-Class Council</li> <li>-Appeal Board</li> <li>-INFOSUP</li> <li>-exhibitions and forums</li> <li>work experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-discussions</li> <li>-reading</li> <li>- meeting other people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-"<i>Projet Personnalisé d'Aide au Retour à l'Emploi</i>" (personal guidance for getting back into work)</li> <li>-personal support for young people</li> <li>-referral to training institute</li> <li>-skills-training contract</li> <li>-vocational training programme</li> <li>-"<i>Plateforme des Vocations</i>" (sector-specific jobs platform)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-discussions</li> <li>-reading</li> <li>- meeting other people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-APL procedure</li> <li>-skills analysis</li> <li>-annual review interview</li> <li>-training plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-discussions</li> <li>-reading</li> <li>-meeting other people</li> </ul>

PLAYERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Information and guidance centre (CIO)</li> <li>-key teaching staff</li> <li>-Guidance Counsellor/psychologist (COP)</li> <li>- Joint university information and guidance centre (SCUIO)</li> <li>-Youth Information Bureau (BIJ)</li> <li>-local authorities</li> <li>-trade unions</li> <li>-local chambers (of commerce, agriculture and industry, etc.)</li> <li>-parents/students association</li> <li>- Medical institutes for education and vocational training of the handicapped (IME/IM-Pro)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-parents</li> <li>-friends</li> <li>-peers</li> <li>-the media</li> <li>-associations (e.g.: Rotary Club)</li> <li>private <i>coaching</i> agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Youth Advisory Centre - Information and Guidance Unit (MILO-PAIO)</li> <li>-National employment agency (ANPE)</li> <li>-Job Centre (MDE)</li> <li>-Local business and job centre (EEE)</li> <li>-Local Network For Youth Training And Job Entry (PLIE)</li> <li>-Youth Information Bureau (BIJ)</li> <li>-local authorities</li> <li>-trade unions</li> <li>-local chambers (of commerce, agriculture and industry, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-parents</li> <li>-friends</li> <li>-peers</li> <li>-the media</li> <li>private <i>coaching</i> agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-AFPA Adult vocational training association</li> <li>-APEC Association for management jobs / APECITA Association for management and technicians in the agriculture sector</li> <li>-CAP EMPLOI network</li> <li>-CIBC inter-institutional skills analysis centre</li> <li>-FONGECIF training fund</li> <li>-local authorities</li> <li>-trade unions</li> <li>-local chambers (of commerce, agriculture and industry, etc.)</li> <li>-unions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-employers</li> <li>-parents</li> <li>-friends</li> <li>-colleagues</li> <li>-the media</li> <li>private <i>coaching</i> agencies</li> </ul>
RESULTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-progressing from one year to the next</li> <li>-repeating a school year</li> <li>-choosing a stream or special option</li> <li>-changing course</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-satisfaction</li> <li>-<i>exit</i><sup>3</sup></li> <li>-<i>voice</i></li> <li>-<i>loyalty</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-studying for a diploma</li> <li>-job offer</li> <li>-continued period of unemployment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-satisfaction</li> <li>-<i>exit</i></li> <li>-<i>voice</i></li> <li>-<i>loyalty</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Right to individual training leave</li> <li>-individual training leave (CIF)</li> <li>-change of job</li> <li>-change to another sector</li> <li>-promotion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-satisfaction</li> <li>-<i>exit</i></li> <li>-<i>voice</i></li> <li>-<i>loyalty</i></li> </ul>

Table 2

EXAMPLES OF GUIDANCE PRACTICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

		Information		Advice		Decision	
		Institutionalised	Non-institutionalised	Institutionalised	Non-institutionalised	Institutionalised	Non-institutionalised
<b>Events</b>	in school	Exhibitions, forums, class meeting with Counsellor/Psychologist	Visit to the Documentation Centre or Youth Information Bureau	Parents-teachers meeting, interview with a Counsellor/Psychologist	Family meeting, discussions with friends	Class Council, Selection Committee	Negotiating session between the family and the directorate or Inspectorate
	post-school	Searching on the Net (e.g. ANPE website)	Messages from personal contacts posting job/training offers	Interview with an advisor at the ANPE or Youth Advisory Centre	Family meeting, discussions with friends	Jobseeker called for interview, benefits withdrawn, job interview	Inheritance and taking over the family business
<b>Behaviour</b>	in school	Arrange interview with a Counsellor/Psychologist, refuse to attend a forum	Actively seek information on the Net	Refuse to attend a meeting or, on the contrary, request a meeting	Request advice from the training supervisor	Form ambitious goals, make call, opt for local work	Limit oneself to the normal procedure, letter of motivation
	post-school	Attend information meetings organised by the agency	Activate personal network, regularly read ads in the Press	Serious preparation for interview with a counsellor	Seek advice from former employer	Accept job offer, refuse to sign a work contract	Unsolicited application, interviews with agency director to avoid losing benefits
<b>Representations</b>	in school	Idea that teachers know everything about guidance counselling	"If my parents say so, then it's true"	"A counsellor/psychologist's job is to point me in the right direction"	"Outside the classroom, teachers are more open about what they think"	Self-censorship, feeling of incompetence	Fatalism or, on the contrary, feeling that "I can make it all work out"
	post-school	"There are never any job ads at the ANPE, you have find everything yourself"	"If you don't have a network of people to call on, there's no point even looking"	"The ANPE exists to find me a job"	"Actual recruiters give better advice than staff at the ANPE"	"It doesn't look good to apply for a job for which you are overqualified"	"Unsolicited applications are a waste of time"

## **The decision - the goal of guidance counselling**

At the heart of these configurations of players involved in the guidance system and its processes there is a "kernel" which consists of the link between the formulation of a request for guidance and the response given by the service provider contacted. This architecture does not detract from the three aspects of the process (information, advice and the decision), which can also be seen in the table above. It simply means that the ultimate goal of any guidance process, whether it involves providing information or advice, is to reach a decision. Information and advice lead, by their very nature, to a decision, whether this be in the short, medium or long term, because they are designed to support, back up or prepare the groundwork for formulating a request for a decision.

It may thus be concluded that the entire system is built around a centre of gravity: the career decision, whether it is initiated at the individual's request or imposed by the guidance service providers based on the status of the individual to whom it is addressed. If we employ the concepts of supply and demand, the market is an obvious metaphor. Further, what seems to be missing from the guidance system to warrant the analogy with the market, is, above all, any competition between the players providing the service. Depending on what the guidance process entails, there are in fact three markets - the information market, the advice market and the decision market. In each case, how far do the service providers feel that they are competing against one other? Then, of course, there is the question of how much this costs. The cost is, however, impossible to define: the right price would be defined at the point where the supply curve meets the demand curve, but the result of the transaction is difficult to assess: should the outcome of "good" guidance be landing a job or making the individual happy or satisfying local business needs<sup>2</sup>?

All the different factors that have a direct or indirect influence on this link between the request for guidance and the response to this request may be represented by the diagram below, which should be looked at starting in the centre. We see that it is the heart of the system that confers upon each individual, organisational or contextual factor its role in the guidance process.

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<sup>2</sup> It cannot be denied that vocational guidance information and advice have nonetheless become a very lucrative market, in the form of exhibitions, magazines, websites and coaching, etc. See Andréani F. and Lartigue P., 2006.



The link between the request and the decision is thus seen to involve two processes: first, negotiation, when the person making the request and the operator come into contact and seek to affect the expected position of the other, and, second, application, which implies either that the wishes expressed are crucial in the eyes of the service provider, or that a solution should be imposed on the person seeking guidance, who does have the final say in deciding whether or not to follow this advice. So, it is possible to separate the request for guidance resulting from all the factors that play a role prior to its formulation, from the provision of guidance, consisting of all the factors that influence the decision-making response.

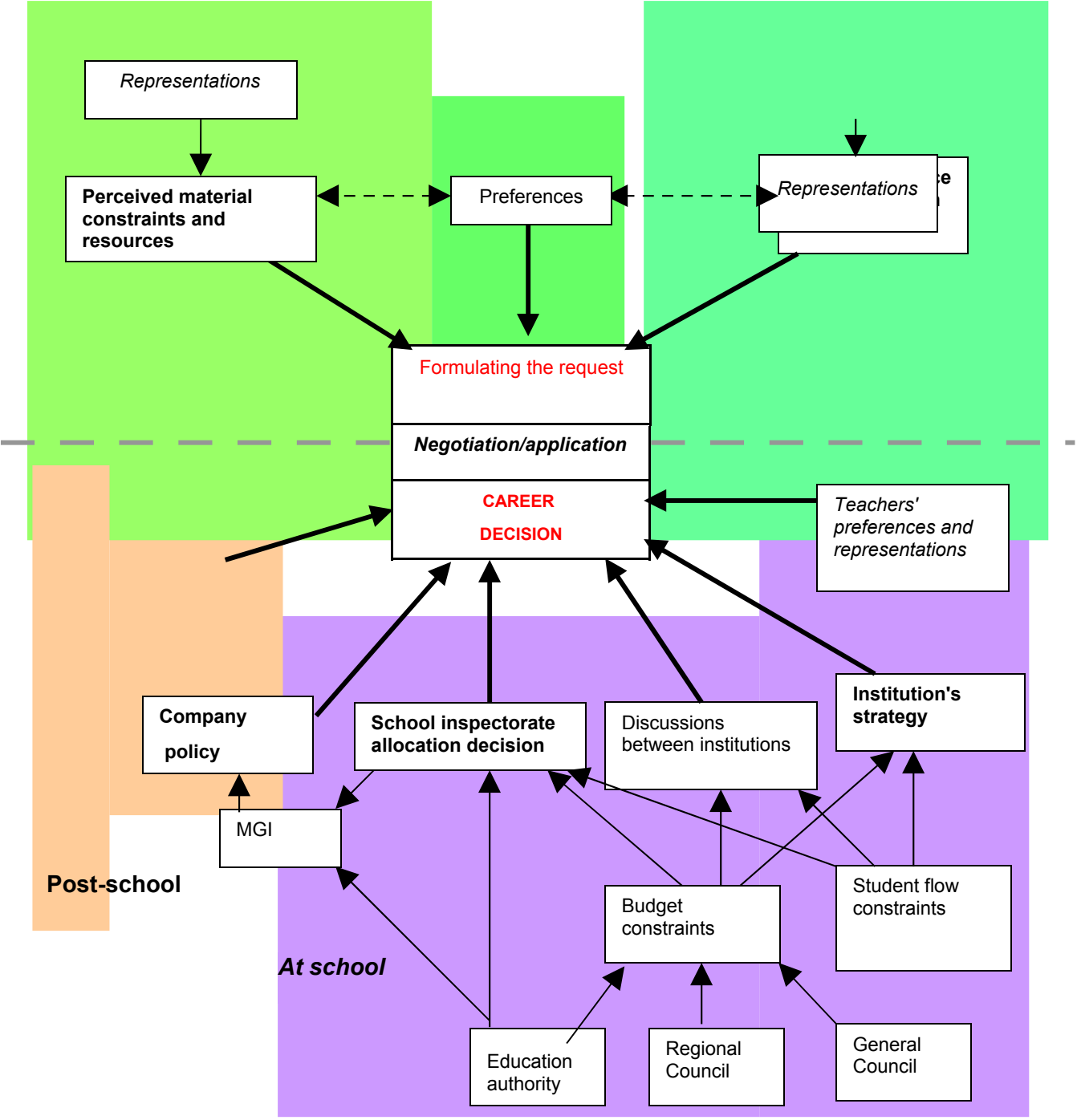
**If we examine the causal relations that generate the formulation of the request and the decision, we see that the service providers appear to be at the heart of the request system (top half of the diagram), prior to the individual making the request. This is a crucial point, since it highlights the fact that guidance professionals, teaching staff and decision-makers, etc. are not only involved once the request for a decision has been made, in response to this request, but also prior to this, through information and advice on the one hand, and the various constraints on the other hand.**

AN INTERPRETATION OF THE FACTORS IN THE SYSTEM

Real *constraints and resources* are the social and environmental factors that have an objective influence on the individual's choices, no matter how conscious of them she may be. They prohibit, oblige or authorise each person to set certain limits on his/her choices. All these constraints and possibilities affect different people in different ways. *Representations* are the beliefs that people form about themselves and the world, and which act as filters on how they perceive their environment or their own behaviour. *Preferences* means all the individual's ambitions, which they express in an ideal world where as many opportunities as possible are open to them. This then does not mean the hopes stated in the request, which are more rationalised, in the sense that they usually tend to factor in all the known constraints and information about the future career. In a

way, preferences are the individual's deepest career aspirations. Perceived *information and advice* are the result of objectively provided information and advice but to which the individual has effectively had access and as s/he has interpreted them (representation). Depending on the case, the *policy of the career guidance organisation* refers to the guidance policies of the ANPE, Youth Advisory Centres (*Missions locales*) and Information and Guidance centres (CIOs), etc., in other words, the policies of all the institutions providing school and post-school guidance counselling. *School inspectorate (IA) strategies* regarding allocation are generally related to the rates of progression, repeating a year or changing course, together with the development of certain initiatives to spread information on guidance counselling. *Budget constraints* are constraints weighing on the institutions and which affect their guidance policy. *Pupil flow constraints* are related as much to the intake of new pupils as to the numbers of pupils that leave school or repeat a year. In this case, the constraints may affect the class level (4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> year of secondary education) or the stream or specialisation (STG and ROC-SM management options, etc.). Insofar as regards training and education institutions, the "*institution's strategies*" relates mainly to the usefulness or effectiveness of repeating a year and the importance of keeping class numbers down to ensure that pupils attain better results, as well as to preferences in terms of streams, relative to continuing with or the desire to propose such and such a specialisation as opposed to another. "*Teachers' preferences and representations*" means not only their implicit or explicit theories regarding guidance and their conceptions of what good guidance may entail, but also the structuring interpretations that they develop in relation to their pupils, families, local culture and the job opportunities in a specific sector or labour pool, etc. *Inter-institution discussions* are held on a more or less formal basis between the heads of institutions in a given area.

DIAGRAM SHOWING THE PLAYERS IN THE GUIDANCE SYSTEM AND THEIR INTERACTIONS



Examining all the configurations of players and the interplay of influences that have a role in the guidance system in this way allows us to avoid three unjustifiable shortcuts: first, of thinking that public policy on guidance counselling only impacts on institutional policy; second, of ignoring the preferences of the people that seek guidance in the link between information, advice and constraints on the request on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the career path decision; and third, on the contrary, of thinking that individual choices are made totally freely, unaffected by the constraints of the system.

The guidance system, focused on the career decision, is therefore subject to various constraints that affect all its component parts. The choices made within the framework of the system, be they individual, organisational or institutional, are made within restrictive mechanisms that need to be clearly understood.

As such, it seems appropriate to deal with the issue of guidance counselling in terms of services rendered to the users via the three aspects of the guidance service: the goal aimed for, the local area in which it is developed and the type of constraint it is likely to exert on the individual's request for guidance.

Now, as we know how the guidance system and the guidance process function, we can use CA to assess the guidance policy.

### **Using the Capability Approach to better understand practical action: a policy assessment**

The guidance policy evaluation can be based on several outputs accounts : a satisfactory rate of beneficiaries, the number of children who didn't pass the exam, the number of young people who don't finish the school year because they realized that the sector to which they have been guided doesn't please them anymore, etc.

As we now know how the system works, it's easy to find where or when or for whom the commodities are not sufficient or not relevant enough. Above all we can study the impact of the conversion factors: are they efficient or sufficient to make individuals use the resources ? And finally we have to study the impact of personal choices on the functioning. Tables 1 and 2 give examples of resources, like institutionalized events when information or advice are given to young people. Let us study one case. The resource that is at disposal but remains not used is a center where counsellors/psychologists receive young people who need information or advice about schools, diplomas, employment possibilities. CA analytical model invites us to question

individuals capacities to use this resource in order to explain why they don't. In the case of such an information center, capacities are both internal and external: are young people aware of the existence of this center ? even if they know it exists, do they understand what it is for ? don't they have very negative representations about this kind of centers ? Are they just able to go there ? Is there any bus to bring them back to school or to home ? Are the opening hours compatible with classes ? If the answers to all these questions are "yes", then the explanation of the fact that young people don't use this center as a resource is their choice not to do it. But whatever the answers are, the CA model gives explanations to understand why the resource is not used and potential directions to make things change.

We would like to insist on the need of a meticulous study of the system and the process implied by the public policy, as we did it in the second part of this paper. Without specifying the players, the interactions, and the events, explanations will remain general and methodological discussions will raise up again.

Beyond its value for conceptualising the individual's actual freedom to achieve, the Capability Approach is interesting in other ways. It enables the formulation of a systemic and systematic analysis of the guidance system from the viewpoint of individuals. In a context marked by growing individualisation of public programmes and an increasing trend towards relying on individual responsibility to secure employment, there is a growing need to establish and closely characterise the relationship between individual responsibility and collective needs. The goal here is to establish a coherent picture based on empirical observations in an analytical framework that incorporates the action of players from different categories.

Moreover, the Capability Approach does not postulate any particular methodological approach. It gives instructions regarding the data to be collected - measure the gaps that exist between formal freedom and the actual freedom of individuals given the social constraints that weigh on them - without dictating the method to choose for conducting this work of investigation and analysis. The pertinent indicators, the subjects to investigate, the social relationships to dissect are thus not furnished, but constructed according to the pursued analytical objective. The aim is therefore to obtain a better characterisation of the observable inadequacies in the *conversion factors* available to individuals and the failures that appear in the operation of actual career guidance systems, while leaving possible policy decisions regarding these *conversion factors* to the imagination of public players.

### ***The central role of "conversion factors"***

The theoretical principles presented above are useful for analysis, but can also be used to question and stimulate the reflections of public decision-makers.

Constraints weigh on the individual *capabilities* of the different players in the guidance system, whether they are beneficiaries, service providers or decision-makers. Analysis must first highlight the limits on *capabilities*, since this can contribute to developing the flexibility required to define a guidance policy that can be applied throughout a person's entire lifetime. At the same time, this approach combining analysis and practice demonstrates that it is in line with a positive conception of the current trend towards the individualisation of public policy, whether it concerns users, service providers, or decision-makers of career guidance public policies. From this perspective, the key concept provided by the Capability Approach is the *conversion factor*. By identifying the constraints that players are subjected to in the guidance process, beginning with young people, decision-makers and public service providers are invited to find ways to provide individuals with the appropriate *conversion factors* to alleviate these constraints.

To illustrate this principle and demonstrate the generic dimension of this approach, a series of examples of constraints could be given, while stressing the method of action proposed by the Capability Approach. These examples are based on academic guidance issues, but the method could also be applied to other areas such as guidance for workers or jobseekers.

First, regarding beneficiaries, geographic constraints are likely to limit mobility, in certain cases and for certain individuals, keeping some young people from entering Level IV ISCED 3 streams and higher. Once this has been observed, it is necessary to examine not only the *resources* available to the individuals in question – particularly public transportation infrastructures - but especially the *individual conversion factors* available to them, namely their actual ability to access these resources depending on financial factors (do they have the means to pay for public and/or private transportation?), geographic factors (distance from residence to public transportation?), technical factors (passes to access public transportation), etc.

Next, for institutional service providers, field studies have revealed differential uses of resource centres depending on whether or not there is on-site career guidance (with a counsellor/psychologist). In other words, school resource centres have more visitors when counselling professionals are rare. Here again is a situation where the *resource*

exists for both service providers and beneficiaries. The problem is thus one of transforming the existing resource into a real *capability* for action. Focussing on the *conversion factors* is a way of developing these *capabilities* by insisting on the need for providing information on career guidance, on how to access school resource centres, how to train school resource centre monitors in providing assistance (in the sense understood in the career guidance world, i.e., attracting and guiding the beneficiaries to guidance services), etc.

Finally, the central role of a known category of invisible players - families - should be mentioned as an example. The findings in this study corroborate the results of all recent guidance studies that unanimously single out the pivotal role of the family in the student's decisions involving career guidance. Although this observation has been presented and regularly confirmed, the question of its being taken into account in policy remains unanswered. Should public decision-makers continue to ignore this state of affairs or integrate this irrefutable reality in discussions on managing guidance? One possible response would be to accept this finding by considering the possibility of giving the family the information resources that would allow them to perform this role. To borrow Sen's terminology, the *functioning* of families in guidance is known, but it occurs in a context of unequal distribution of *resources*. The results clearly show the divisions and significant inequalities in the resources available to families, whether these resources are real or perceived as more or less transferable during guidance counselling. The role of public authorities could initially consist in taking action to guarantee an equitable distribution of *resources*. The Capability Approach is valuable because it emphasises the fact that to stop at an equitable distribution of resources would leave inequalities in the ability to actually use these resources. Policy makers could ignore *conversion factors* and decide to provide equal access to guidance information for all families. But people would immediately notice that the families with the most social and cultural capital make use of these resources, while those with the least use them only slightly or not at all, even if they theoretically have access to them. It is therefore important to give greater consideration to these *conversion factors*, for example, by having public action focus more closely on these families.

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