

Governance and Finance-Related Characteristics of ‘Revived’ Social Investment Policies: A Greek Example

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Abstract

In a context characterized by the ‘rediscovery’ of the social investment approach to welfare provision and a renewed emphasis on ideas relevant to this approach – such as investing in human capital as a means to enhance individual capacity to cope with social risks – apprenticeship programmes have come to the forefront of public debate. This article draws on the findings of a large-scale, mostly qualitative research project (December 2015–March 2017) that reviewed apprenticeships in crisis-ridden Greece and in the framework of which, inter alia, 150 stakeholders (apprentices, graduates, employers, etc) were surveyed. It offers, for the first time, a critical and succinct, but also comprehensive overview of the characteristics associated with two crucial dimensions of a policy which typifies this ‘revived’ social investment approach: the governance and financing of apprenticeships in Greece. It is argued that the governance and financing of apprenticeships in this country are characterized by positive features, as well as severe shortcomings. The latter undermine the effectiveness of the policy and thus pose obstacles to the potential to attain the goals related to the core of the social investment approach.

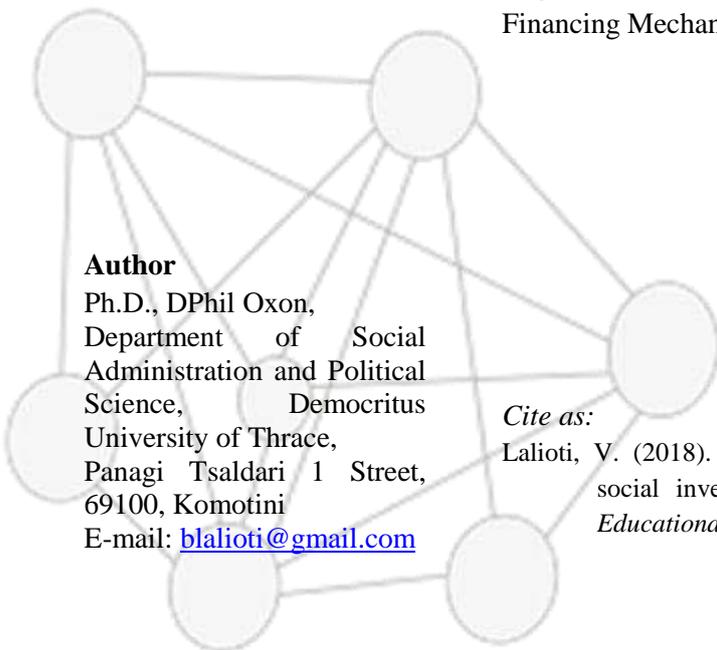
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INTRODUCTION

This exploratory article draws on the findings of a large-scale review of the Greek apprenticeship system. It offers for the first time, a critical, succinct, and comprehensive overview of the characteristics of two crucial dimensions of a policy which typifies the 'revived' social investment approach to welfare provision in crisis-ridden Greece: the governance and financing of apprenticeships.

After decades of relative neglect, apprenticeships, part of the traditionally underdeveloped vocational and educational (VET) system in Greece, are at the forefront of public debate. The Manpower Employment Organization (OAED), i.e. the Greek public employment agency, remains, via its 51 school units (commonly known as EPAS), the main provider of apprenticeship programmes. However, this new interest in apprenticeships – i.e. programmes typified by alternating periods of systematic and long-term training in an educational institution and the workplace, a contractual relationship between apprentice and employer, and remuneration for apprentices (Cedefop, 2014, pp. 25–26) – is reflected in a series of recent interventions, including the introduction of the National Strategic Framework for Upgrading VET (Law 4386/2016), and, in particular, the Quality Framework for Apprenticeships (QFA) (Joint Ministerial Decision no. 26385/20 February 2017).

This renewed attention is largely linked to a revival of the 'social investment approach' to welfare provision, which developed in the wake of the 1997 financial crisis in Asia. This approach was regarded as an alternative to neoliberal solutions, and combined social-democratic views with views that emphasized the effectiveness of market mechanisms (Hemerijck, 2012). At the centre of the approach was the idea that the state should motivate and offer opportunities to individuals, in order to create human capital reserves and enhance individual capacity to cope with the social risks associated with the transition to a post-Fordist society and labour market (Jenson and Saint-Martin, 2006, p. 430). The supporters of social investment strategies highlighted the need for extensive recalibration of the welfare state, with a focus on policy measures related to fields with a future-facing orientation, such as life-long education and training (Esping-Andersen et al., 2002), and saw the respective policies as empowering individuals and contributing to economic growth and social cohesion (Morel, Palier and Palme, 2012). In contrast, other commentators denounced the perceived shift from collective to individual responsibility, the distinction made between 'passive' and 'active' welfare measures, and the ambiguous effects on poverty and inequality (Cantillon, 2011; Petmesidou, 2014, pp. 24–28).

One of the clearest expressions of this 'rediscovery' of the social investment approach during the recent financial crisis, which also gave rise to a fast growing social investment-related literature stream (see e.g. Bonoli, 2013), is the increasing recognition that offering a range of different types of education is a crucial component of social policy. From a theoretical social investment perspective, education is, *inter alia*, a key tool for coping with social problems (Di Stasio and Solga, 2017, p. 315). Indeed, broadly speaking, participation in apprenticeship programmes is thought to enhance employability and improve young people's skills and, thus, is seen to represent a worthwhile long-term investment (see e.g.

Scarpetta, Sonnet and Manfredi, 2010, pp. 24, 27; Eichhorst, Hinte and Rinne, 2013, p. 16). Indeed, EU data indicates that at a time of generally high youth unemployment, 60–70% of apprentices across Europe (rising to as much as 90% in some cases) move into a job directly following their apprenticeship (European Commission, 2017). Similarly, in Greece, the percentage of apprentices entering employment upon completion of OAED apprenticeship programmes is high – approximately 70% overall, and even higher in specialties such as IT (Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Welfare 2015, pp. 13–18).

Against this backdrop, however, dimensions of apprenticeships, such as their governance and financing arrangements, although acknowledged as crucial to the successful implementation of apprenticeship programmes (Cedefop, 2016), remain relatively under-researched. According to the literature, a key factor in governance arrangements – i.e. the patterns and mechanisms for accommodating interdependence and coordinating activities of different actors – and their effectiveness is the relative influence of the state, the market and professional groups (see e.g. Rauner et al., 2010; Rauner and Wittig, 2013). In the case of 'mixed' governance systems, attention is paid to the degree of coordination between different stakeholders and to whether management is input-oriented based on rules and resources, or output-oriented with a focus on the products and services to be achieved by the management process.

Overall, effective governance structures appear to include a high level of coordination between stakeholders, as well as a combination of input-oriented management, characterized by a consistent legal framework and explicit regulations, and output-oriented management that targets performance efficiency and quality assurance. Moreover, the involvement of social partners and their relevant institutions in the management of apprenticeship programmes, as well as close cooperation between social partners and the other relevant actors, is believed to be crucial to the success of apprenticeships – it is, for instance, assumed to prevent the misuse of apprenticeships as a form of cheap labour (OECD, 2014, pp. 7, 13, 16).

The financing of apprenticeships, on the other hand, is usually explored in the context of the costs of apprenticeships (see e.g. Muehlemann et al., 2010), and less often is the sole research subject (see e.g. Department of Education, 2018). As in the case of governance, there is variation in the financing arrangements for apprenticeships. Broadly speaking, they are two main positions: shared financing and state financing (Cedefop, 2016). One of the main arguments in the literature is that employers are sensitive to costs, although sharing the costs of apprenticeships with the state appears not to be, at least on its own, a factor that determines participation in apprenticeship programmes. Furthermore, a more 'equitable' sharing of costs between the state and employers is pursued by governments in countries with a strong tradition in apprenticeships, as a means of more efficient funding (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, 2013).

In Greece, where apprenticeships have attracted increasing research interest in recent years, often in the context of the country's VET strategy (see e.g. Paidoussi, 2016) and more rarely as the main subject of research (see e.g. Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Welfare, 2015), the simple description of the core roles of actors, such as OAED and

employers, has not been accompanied by further analysis. Where the financing of apprenticeships in Greece has been considered, as in a 2015 Foundation for Economic and Industrial Research (IOBE) study, research indicates that employer contributions are arguably high for employers in poor, working-class areas, but, in general, are regarded as acceptable. Furthermore, companies also face crisis-driven financial difficulties that affect their ability to participate in apprenticeships (Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Welfare, 2015, pp. 39–40, 50–51).

Building on the above, as well as on the long tradition of studies devoted to the evaluation of apprenticeships based on the views of stakeholders (see e.g. Mulkeen et al., 2017), this exploratory article seeks to fill a gap in the apprenticeship-related literature in Greece by addressing the following research questions:

(i) What are the key characteristics of the governance and financing of apprenticeships offered by OAED, the main provider of apprenticeships in Greece?

(ii) What are the major strengths and weaknesses of the governance and financing arrangements of OAED apprenticeships?

It is argued that, despite some strengths, the governance and financing of apprenticeships are characterized by significant shortcomings, which may seriously limit the extent to which apprenticeships can realize the goals associated with the core ideas of the social investment approach.

The following sections cover research methodology and the presentation of results, while a short concluding section discusses the main findings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The analysis in this article draws on a large-scale, mostly qualitative research project undertaken between December 2015 and March 2017. The project reviewed apprenticeships in Greece using an analytical framework developed by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (commonly known as Cedefop) (Cedefop, 2015). The framework covers ten thematic areas, including governance and financing, with a series of 'operational descriptors' presented for each thematic area. Governance-related descriptors include, inter alia, whether the roles and responsibilities of the key players are clearly defined and whether employer organizations and trade unions are actively engaged at all levels. Finance-related descriptors include if the enterprises offering apprenticeships pay wages and cover indirect costs and if employer organizations and trade unions cover part of the costs.

The project included extensive desk research, and three consecutive rounds of fieldwork which surveyed 150 individuals¹ from different stakeholder groups. Research participants were identified with the help of key actors involved in the design and implementation of apprenticeship programmes, such as representatives of OAED. Attention was paid to securing a broadly representative spread across stakeholder groups, regions and (in the case of enterprises offering apprenticeship positions) economic sectors. Informed consent was obtained and care was taken to protect the identity of participants.

The first survey round (April–June 2016) collected factual information from stakeholders (practitioners and beneficiaries). A total of 100 semi-structured interviews was carried out (with 27 students, 15 recent graduates, 23 teachers and school directors, 33 company representatives and 2 OAED employees). The second survey round (September–October 2016) built on the findings of the first round, but focused on the challenges faced in developing and implementing apprenticeship programmes, and the current and future roles of the institutions involved. This stage involved 35 semi-structured interviews (with 22 representatives of national agencies engaged in apprenticeships, 11 social partners and 2 experts in apprenticeship programmes) and an online survey of 828 employers². The third and final round (January–February 2017) focused on possible solutions and recommendations for improvements in the apprenticeship system and included five semi-structured interviews (with three policy-makers, one social partner representative, and one apprenticeship programme expert). In the course of the project, four round-table discussions were also carried out with participants from stakeholder groups represented in the interviews.

The governance and financing of apprenticeships were mainly examined during the first two research rounds. Questions on both these issues were addressed to school directors and teachers, employers, and staff of agencies involved in apprenticeships, such as officers at OAED Centres for the Promotion of Employment (commonly known as KPA). Typical questions on governance concerned, for instance, the main roles of actors, whether there was a gap between theory and practice, and the possibility of cooperation with other actors. In terms of financing, typical questions covered the costs of apprenticeships and the incentives offered to enterprises. Additionally, the online survey of employers included a few questions relevant to financing mechanisms, as exemplified by questions on the financial and non-financial support deemed necessary to encourage enterprises to offer apprenticeships.

FINDINGS

Governance

In theory, the roles of key players in Greek apprenticeships are defined by national legislation. For instance, OAED (supervised by the Ministry of Labour), alongside EPAS teachers, is responsible, *inter alia*, for monitoring the school- and company-based components of apprenticeship programmes (Article 2, Joint Ministerial Decision no 1.7195/Our Ref. 3.1289/27 May 2011). Indeed, the research found that more than two-thirds of interviewees across all stakeholder groups had a relatively clear picture of the institutional rights and responsibilities of the main actors involved in apprenticeships.

Interviewees agreed on the coordinating and decision-making role of OAED, which was also seen as having good knowledge of the labour market and good links with employers. They also agreed on the core contribution of the EPAS, and the relatively explicit tasks of other actors, such as the National Organization for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP), which is responsible for evaluating and updating occupational profiles. There was also broad consensus on the key role of EPAS teachers. The relatively small number of interviewees – mainly employers – who did not have a clear

picture of the rights and responsibilities of main actors attributed this to inadequate communication and marketing by OAED.

At the same time, however, the interviews suggested that there were actors whose roles were not clearly stipulated in legislation; or whose roles were only partially explicit; or whose actions were, at least in part, informal, ad hoc and dependent on their own initiative. More than half of interviewees agreed that the roles of social partners and chambers of industry and commerce are not clearly stipulated. In theory, social partners sit on OAED's administration board and thus can directly influence the development and implementation of OAED interventions, including apprenticeships. Nonetheless, in practice, their involvement in the design and implementation of apprenticeship schemes has, with few exceptions, been limited. A social partner representative said:

We have a deep knowledge of the market and good links with employers and would be willing to become more engaged in apprenticeships. For example, we could participate in a coordinating body that would comprise representatives of OAED, ministries and social partners. At this point, however, social partners, especially members of the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants (GSEVEE), that represents owners of SMEs, play a role mainly in formulating the content of practical workplace training, rather than shaping curricula. Their feedback is crucial, but occurs on a case-by-case basis at both the local and national levels.

The framework for collaboration between OAED and social partners is likewise seen as inadequate. Moreover, there was broad consensus amongst interviewees that the rights and obligations of employers are only partially clear, mainly in terms of the working conditions for apprentices and the financial contribution of enterprises, but not in terms of the content of work-based learning, the ad hoc nature of which is regarded as a problem for the quality of company-based training. Similarly, notwithstanding a legal framework that describes the rights and duties of main actors, some of the activities carried out by them are informal, ad hoc and largely dependent on their own initiative. All interviewees agreed that this was especially the case for EPAS teachers, who often acted with the encouragement of school directors.

Such activities include, inter alia, visiting enterprises to assess the working conditions for apprentices, and updating the content of courses and curricula, so as to make them more compatible with labour market needs as explained by one teacher:

There is a gap between the content of the courses and what the market needs, especially in the case of specialties that involve the application of technology, such as mechanics. Given that the readjustment of curricula involves a bureaucratic Ministry of Education and the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP) procedure that requires considerable time, what happens in practice is that teachers, on their own initiative and in an ad hoc and informal manner, adjust the content of the courses they teach to labour market needs. School directors often encourage us to do so.

Overall, processes vital to the success of apprenticeships, such as matching specialties to labour market needs, largely draw on a series of partly 'informal' actions, which occur on a regular basis and have thus become 'quasi-formal/institutionalized'. Annual OAED meetings, involving representatives of EPAS, social partners and chambers are an example of such activity.

The above should be viewed in conjunction with performance-related problems, which further jeopardize the governance of apprenticeships, even in the case of actors with a clear institutional role in the system, such as the KPA. The following extract from an interview with an OAED employee is revealing:

Although KPA provide EPAS with access to a comprehensive database on positions offered by companies, they have problems in fulfilling their role, since they suffer from understaffing. Moreover, they cannot provide updated data on labour supply and demand at the local level.

Interviews with KPA employees confirmed understaffing, and also highlighted the relatively limited and mostly informal cooperation with EPAS schools and employers. In particular, KPA and EPAS cooperation depends on the personal relationships between KPA officers and EPAS teachers and directors, as well as on the geographical distance between KPA and EPAS: the greater the distance, the weakest the collaboration. Additionally, the research highlighted friction between the main actors, especially OAED and the Ministry of Education, which hampers the success of apprenticeships.

Overall, the existing governance system does not appear to prioritize quality and efficiency, with more than half of interviewees commenting on superficial and inadequate systems for monitoring training, which largely depend on the initiatives of EPAS teachers, and lack the essential involvement of other key actors, such as employers.

Although the efficient coordination and coherence of governance remains a challenge, representatives of different actors expressed interest in more extensive participation in the design and implementation of apprenticeships, as exemplified by the willingness of social partners and chambers to register the skills needs of companies. Furthermore, although contrasting views were expressed on the roles they were willing to play, interviewees from all stakeholder groups were positive about cooperation with other actors. Finally, interviewees made a series of suggestions as to how to improve governance, such as re-establishing OAED's committees that dealt with the adaptation of training curricula to labour market needs, as a means to avoid delays in updating curricula. There was also general agreement on the salience of clarity in the roles of different actors engaged in apprenticeships and the need to avoid overlaps.

Financing

A Greek apprentice receives 75% of the minimum wage for a full day's work for an unskilled worker (€22.83), as determined by the National General Collective Labour Agreement – i.e. €17.12 per day. The wage, which is lower than the daily wage for so-called

'voucher schemes' or 'community service' programmes, remains the same for the duration of the apprenticeship (Joint Ministerial Decision no. 10186/D5.12/9 April 2013).

Apprenticeships are subsidized by domestic and (mainly) European funds (Article 1, Joint Ministerial Decision no. 1.7195/ Our Ref. 3. 1289/27 May 2011). The €11 per day subsidy is identical for apprenticeships across all economic sectors. The employer contributes €6.12 per day (plus €3.40 for social security contributions, giving a total of €9.52 per day). Employer contributions are decided annually by OAED.

Furthermore, at the time of the research, national legislation included no reference to liability for indirect costs (e.g. for materials and the time of workplace trainers) incurred in delivering the company-based component of apprenticeships. There was also no mention of whether the duration and organization of apprenticeships allows enterprises to recoup their investment, through apprentices' work. Aside from the financial incentive given to employers in the form of apprenticeship subsidies (see above), there is no reference to other kinds of incentives, or to employer organizations or trade unions contributing to apprenticeship costs.

All interviewees confirmed the above characteristics of apprenticeship financing. Moreover, there was broad consensus that the state's contribution to the wage of apprentices is the most important factor in determining whether enterprises offer apprenticeships. Indeed, less than one-tenth of enterprises, mainly large private organizations, said that they would hire an apprentice without financial support. These were also the enterprises that attached the greatest value to the possibility of non-financial incentives, such as gaining publicity for offering apprenticeship placements.

While more than two-thirds of employers agreed that their financial contribution to the cost of apprenticeships was not high, roughly the same percentage argued that if participation had no cost for them (or had a lower cost), offering apprenticeship positions would become more attractive. One employer said:

I own a small company and have difficulties in paying my share. Personally, I have no doubt that being exempted from funding part of the wage and social insurance contributions of apprentices would be a strong incentive to take them on.

The research also identified companies that had withdrawn from apprenticeships, because the subsidy was regarded as insufficient, as well as employers who operate in poor working-class areas who perceive their contribution as high.

The salience of financial incentives is confirmed by the online survey: when asked about the benefits of apprenticeships relative to other training programmes, the top answer³ given by employers was that apprenticeships cost less than the alternatives. As mentioned above, employers were not the only stakeholders who acknowledged the impact of subsidies, with one school director stating that 'some enterprises fire employees with long-term employment contracts and hire apprentices, in order to lower their labour cost'.

These findings should be considered alongside the view shared by the vast majority of the employers interviewed that non-financial incentives would not convince them to increase

their financial contribution. In contrast, interviewees from other stakeholder groups, especially those representing social partners and national agencies, agreed on the necessity of non-financial incentives, but thought these should be complementary to financial incentives.

Furthermore, more than three-quarters of interviewees from all stakeholder groups believed that the Greek financial crisis and the accompanying austerity measures resulted in many companies finding it difficult to pay their contribution to apprentices' wages, thus reducing their interest in offering apprenticeships. This contrasts with the view expressed by less than a quarter of interviewees who argued that, especially for entrepreneurs without employees, taking on apprentices is the only way enterprises can currently survive.

It should be noted that the majority of the employers interviewed stated that the duration and organization of apprenticeships does not allow them to recoup their investment through the work the apprentice does. Only representatives of enterprises which had successfully trained apprentices and subsequently retained them as employees expressed a different opinion. Moreover, most employers agreed that indirect costs (e.g. the time spent by staff on workplace training) are not a disincentive, as explained by one employer:

Personally, indirect costs, such as spending time to respond to administrative matters, do not discourage me from offering apprenticeship positions. In contrast, the main disincentive is that apprentices are coming in the enterprise without 'being ready', since this requires additional effort in the workplace.

Interviewees from all stakeholder groups also confirmed that employer organizations and social partners representing employees and other actors do not contribute to direct or indirect costs of apprenticeships. Furthermore, although employer organizations and social partners acknowledged the need for more financial resources for apprenticeships, they did not express an intention to contribute to such financing. Similarly, with regard to the training of workplace trainers employer organizations, social partners and representatives of national agencies, looked to other funding sources, such as the EU and, more often, to enterprises themselves, in order to cover the associated costs. .

Finally, the research highlighted a series of suggestions made by stakeholders, such as the introduction of additional incentives (e.g. tax reductions or state subsidies for other employment positions for enterprises that take on additional apprentices). Some also suggested that enterprises facing difficulties in paying their contribution should have the cost of apprenticeships fully covered.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

In a context characterized by the revival of the social investment approach, and an associated renewed interest in apprenticeships, this exploratory article offers for the first time, an overview of two relatively under-researched but crucial dimensions of apprenticeships in Greece: governance and financing. Despite the study's limitations, which reflect the restrictions inherent in qualitative research, the validity of the findings is enhanced by the effort made to strengthen the representativeness and scope of the research.

Viewed in conjunction with the literature outlined above, the article reveals a 'flawed' governance model, characterized by the co-existence of relatively explicit roles for most stakeholders and ad hoc processes that have acquired a quasi-formal character. Although in theory Greece operates a mixed model, the role of key players, such as social partners, is not clearly stipulated and is, therefore, limited in practice. The situation is further aggravated by shortcomings in the performance of actors, as well as in the interactions between major institutions. The existence of a legal framework defining the roles of main actors stands out as the main strength of Greek apprenticeships, while major weaknesses include the relatively limited engagement of other actors and the often informal nature of cooperation. Overall, more attention appears to be given to an input-oriented management approach that prioritizes rules, albeit in an inadequate way, than to an output-oriented management approach that focuses on quality and efficiency.

In terms of financing, apprenticeships in Greece are typified by shared funding, involving the state and employers, with no contribution from other actors. Although financial incentives are widely perceived as the most important factor in determining the provision of apprenticeship placements, in contrast to other countries higher costs would discourage Greek employers from offering placements. The research also confirmed the finding of previous research that enterprises in poor, working-class areas find it most difficult to meet their responsibilities regarding apprentices. Further, while the existence of a financial incentive for enterprises is regarded as a major strength, this appears to be overshadowed by weaknesses, such as the non-coverage of part of the costs of apprenticeships by other actors (e.g. employer organizations); again, this contrasts with trends seen in other countries.

Building on the above, and taking into account suggestions made by interviewees, the research highlights the need for improving the governance and financing of apprenticeships in Greece. At first glance, such promise is included in recent policy developments, such as the 2017 QFA. Illustrative of the changes expected are the creation of new bodies, encouragement of the promotion of apprenticeships at the regional and local levels, an enhanced role for social partners and the allocation of EU resources for apprenticeships, proportionately to the number of apprentices per educational unit.

The establishment of new structures at all levels and the strengthening of the roles of actors may provide the basis for a more coherent system that will benefit from the input of a wide range of institutions. Yet, it remains unclear how these structures will fulfill their roles, provisions for organizations with a previous role in the system, such as EOPPEP, are missing, and the enhanced role of actors such as social partners, is largely restricted to policy design.

In terms of financing, changes mainly relate to the introduction of non-financial incentives, although little detail is provided. Instead, the continuing over-reliance on financial incentives is problematic, especially in conjunction with the perception of apprentices as 'cheap labour'. Furthermore, the system's dependence on EU and government funding may jeopardize the sustainability of apprenticeships, especially given the expected reduction in EU subsidies beyond the current 2014–2020 programmatic period.

Hence, the identified shortcomings discussed here may undermine the overall effectiveness of apprenticeships in Greece, and thus the ability of individuals to cope with social risks such as unemployment that participation in apprenticeships is thought to combat. In other words, they may seriously limit the potential of 'revived' social investment policies, such as the ones examined here, to fulfill the goals which are at the core of the still contested social investment approach and associated strategies.

Notes

1. This number includes ten individuals who participated only in the round tables and not in the interviews. Otherwise, round-table participants are a subset of the interviewees.
2. Number of completed questionnaires.
3. Participants could provide multiple answers.

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