STUDY OF THE NATURE OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS AND THEIR VOCATIONAL IDENTITY, IN THE EXPRESSION OF THEIR ORIENTATION CHOICES, ACCORDING TO SEN'S CAPABILITIES THEORY

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Abstract

In 2023, 88% of new French students said they felt free to formulate their preferences for their first year at university. However, 34,9% of students manage to complete their bachelor's degree in more than 3 years (EESR n°16). Reorientation at the end of the first year therefore remains important.
The originality of our work lies in the simultaneous study of the individual's environment and internal resources, considering data such as parental involvement, compared with that of teachers and psychologists. Our research is part of the PIA (Plan Investissement Avenir) Ile-de-France program and focuses both on young people's psychological capacity to make a career choice, and on their perception of their environment as helping them to make that choice. To do this, our work is based on the capability approach: Sen (1992) builds his theory from a systemic perspective to understand the ability to choose (capability) in a favorable or unfavorable environment (enabling or disabling). Consequently, true freedom would consist in having sufficient environmental resources (family, school, institutional support, etc.), which psychological resources could convert into the ability to choose (Fernagu, 2022).Our aim is twofold: on the one hand, to gain a better understanding of high school students' perceptions of what they themselves recognize as the favorable environment (person, institution, etc.) for their choice of orientation. On the other hand, to explore, at the same time, their professional identities (Lannegrand-Willems and Perchec, 2017) in order to understand how guidance is as much a collective issue as an individual one.
Our qualitative study is based on a crossed methodology: a thematic analysis was carried out on semi-directive interviews from 3 focus groups of high school students (6 girls, 7 boys). This analysis was cross-referenced with a lexicometric analysis of textual corpora. Among our findings, students perceive the actions of their enabling environments through individuals. Indeed, teachers, Psychologues de l'Éducation Nationale (PsyEN) and parents provide support that is perceived differently depending on whether it falls under "support" (Chen and Solberg, 2018), such as teachers and fathers. When it comes to mothers and PsyENs, it appears more as a form of care ("caring"). Finally, while support is presented as an aid to making a choice, our cross-analyses highlight the act of renouncing other possible options ((by graphe of the word): this act would be done by the young person, without support or in a truly conscious manner.

Keywords: Enabling environment, vocational identity, capabilities.

1. Introduction

In 2023, 88% of new French students say they felt free to formulate their wishes on Parcoursup (the national platform for pre-registration in the first year of university). But at the same time, 83% say they also experienced stress during this stage, which they consider unclear (IGESR report, 2023). Questions of choice, selection and failure permeate the final year of high school and have a major impact on the first year of university. While the number of undergraduates increases every year, in 2018, only 34.9% graduated in 3 years and 65.1% repeated or reoriented (EESR report, 2023). This platform consists of an assignment procedure, which undermines the possibility of a chosen orientation when the wish is refused. The economic theory of Sen's capability approach (2000) proposes a systemic reading of the question of choice. Sen constructs several concepts to explain the shared responsibility of this act. We choose within an environment that may or may not support us. The capability approach draws on a systemic perspective to understand the possibility of choosing (capability) in a favorable or unfavorable (enabling or disabling) environment. Real freedom would then consist in benefiting from sufficient environmental resources (family, school, institutional support, etc.), which psychic resources could convert into the ability to choose

(Fernagu, 2022). The aim of our work is to grasp the possibility of applying the Capability Approach (CA) in the field of guidance: According to Sen (2000), equity between individuals is based on the balance between the external resources (enabling environment) and the internal resources (psychic) of the individual. In terms of the capability to make a decision, vocational identity is this perception or awareness of one's personality traits, skills, strengths, interests, and goals. The stronger this awareness, the greater the well-being (Lannegrand and Perchec, 2017), and the greater the chances of finding a guidance aligned with one's identity. Vocational identity is based on the work of Marcia (1966): depending on the degree of exploration and commitment, an individual's identity can be characterized. Diffused identity consists in the absence of exploration and commitment. Then person is unavailable for any reflection in terms of career guidance. Forclosed identity corresponds to the absence of exploration with a strong commitment. For this person, there's nothing to think about, no hesitation, and only one career can be considered. The moratorium identity consists in exploring the possibilities of guidance open to me, without making a choice that would allow me to commit myself. Finally, the achieved identity is the combination of the two actions favoring the most appropriate career guidance for the individual. Since then, other studies have extended this theory, but for the purposes of this exploratory study, we have focused on these four typologies.

From these two resources, the individual can express his choices, he is able to do so at that moment. The expression of the capability to choose the career guidance oneself can be defined on the basis of Deci and Ryan's (2002) theory of self-determination, on which Brasselet and Guerrien (2010) based their definition of the feeling of freedom to choose. Feeling free to choose fosters greater motivation and satisfaction. This is self-determination. Deci and Ryan (2002) characterize two types of motivation: When the individual makes a choice under pressure from those around him or her, in order to get a good grade, this is extrinsic motivation. In this case, self-determination is low. Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is what leads the individual to make a choice for its own sake. Because the individual enjoys practicing this discipline, he or she chooses university studies so as to practice only this discipline. From then on, the individual chooses not on the basis of the interests that these studies might bring him, but by the pleasure of practicing it every day.

Sen (2000) differentiates between two types of freedom: formal freedom and real freedom. When an individual's basic needs (food, housing, health) are not met, or when he or she lives in an disabling environment and/or lacks sufficient mental resources, then he or she is only formally free. On the other hand, when an individual's basic needs are met, they live in an enabling environment, and they have the psychic resources (vocational identity), then they are really free to choose. How can this be understood in the field of guidance?

We hypothesize that real freedom corresponds to the combination of an enabling environment, a vocational identity of the achieved identity type, enabling the expression of a strong sense of freedom, strong self-determination, and intrinsic motivation.

The second hypothesis is that formal freedom corresponds to the combination of an disabling environment, a diffused or foreclosed identity, with the expression of a weak sense of freedom, low self-determination, and extrinsic motivation or amotivation.

2. Method

We conducted an exploratory study in the context of a Programme Investissement Avenir (PIA), based on semi-directive interviews recorded in focus groups. A crossover methodology was used: the textual corpus was processed by thematic analysis and lexicometric analysis.

The interview grid was designed according to the recommendations of Bonvin and Farvaque (2007) and therefore focused on deprivations of freedom, which are easier to explore than freedoms (renunciations, perceived impossibilities). The questions focused on the students' perceived environment (parents, teachers, school, peers) and the responses were analysed in terms of their commitment and level of exploration of their career plans to identify their vocational identity. The responses allowed us to see how we could identify whether an environment was perceived by the individual as enabling. In the light of this identification, we examined the way in which a capability to choose oneself is expressed.

Thematic analysis: Once the interviews had been transcribed, the elements of the textual corpus were sorted and the most significant text segments were selected and sorted into themes and sub-themes. The content analysis notebook was used to classify all the segments from all the interviews. Once all the elements had been sorted, a cross-sectional analysis was carried out to quantify the shared viewpoints.

Lexicometric analysis: The interviewer's interventions were first removed in order to focus on the students' responses. Each participant was coded according to the following variables: gender, school, level of the school's social position index, vocational identity, enabling environment, chosen track (technological or general). This coding allows for inter-individual analysis. After the textual corpus was then cleaned, an analysis using the Hierarchical Descending Classification (CHD) Reinert method was then carried out to

identify the classes representing the main themes. This allowed us to process words, active forms and hapaxes. Class and word graphs were created to visualise the most frequently used words and the associations between them. A Correspondence Factorial Analysis (CFA) by class was carried out to check whether certain classes might share certain word occurrences.

2.1. Participants

We conducted 3 semi-structured interviews with 3 focus groups in 3 high schools in the Paris region: 6 girls and 7 boys in their final year of high school answered our questions.

2.1.1. Results of thematic analysis.
Concerning the environment: Firstly, 8 out of 13 students mentioned the support of their main teachers. Two students spoke of a negative impact due to the transmission of incorrect information on the choice of specialties and radical opposition to the choice formulated by the student. For 3 students there was no impact, either because they didn't express themselves on the subject or because the main teacher felt that they didn't need any help. Secondary school students perceived heterogeneity in the support given by teachers. They explain this difference in terms of the teachers' passion for teaching. As a result, upper secondary students perceive a strong commitment to support students by informing them about possible career choices and according to their profile. Secondary students characterize teachers' view of the university world as negative. To counter this, students explain why they turn to student testimonies to multiply their opinions and hope for more positive, less anxiety-provoking visions. *Parents:* 7 students feel that they are not accompanied by their parents, and they distinguish a difference in accompaniment between mother and father: 3 students expressed their satisfaction to be accompanied by their father. However, the description of the support given to these 3 students shows that the father anticipates the child's choices, in particular by seeking information long before his child does. The father may also be very distant in his support of the child's career choices or may not be interested in them at all. 8 students spoke positively about the support of their mothers. This support is different from that of the father. The mother seems to provide moral and administrative support (designing the Parcoursup file, writing the cover letter, etc.).

PsyEN (National Educational Psychologist): 6 out of 13 students praised the support provided by the school psychologist. 2 students were negative about this support. And 5 students said that they didn't need to meet this professional. The availability of this professional in the school is considered to be too low. Pupils with health problems, for example, expressed the importance of this professional. *Peers:* 9 out of 13 students don't recognize the influence of their peers on their choice of career. And friends seem to be far removed from the issue of guidance. Among friends, it's more a question of playing and relaxing. *Parcoursup:* 8 out of 13 high school students say that the platform has a negative impact on their career plans. The platform causes too much stress because students feel that their choice is blind rather than informed. Students don't see a connection between the specialties they have chosen in high school and university courses. Their plans don't seem to change until they receive information about their placement in the first year of university. *Institutional actions:* The students have a partial perception of the actions presented to them. For example, they identify only one action, but the other actions identified during these three interviews concern actions carried out on the initiative of the school teachers or PsyEN.

With regard to internal resources: 7 out of 13 students found it impossible, either for financial reasons or because of the refusal of a parent, a teacher or PsyEN. *Difficulty in making choices:* 10 out of 13 students reported difficulties in making choices: understanding all the possibilities is made difficult by the abundance of information and websites. Brilliant students may also find it difficult to get their choice heard, or to get their change of choice heard. *Difficulty in choosing between several options:* 11 out of 13 high school students had difficulty choosing between different options. In their final year of secondary school, students have to give up one of their three specialties and this seems to be the first experience of a choice that causes a lot of stress, even sadness, in giving up a discipline. *The act of giving up:* 8 out of 13 students have given up certain options on their own. This is a complex issue to grasp as the act of giving up is rarely verbalized. However, students may give up on certain career dreams because they feel they are not good enough, or because the dream does not sufficiently guarantee them a job.

Regarding the expression of the capability to choose oneself: 10 out of 13 students perceive their freedom of choice as partial. On the other hand, 3 students perceive their freedom as total. The perception of partial freedom is linked to the perception that one's choices are made within an ecosystem of career guidance. The secondary school students understand the challenges of Parcoursup. One high school student, on the other hand, considers himself to be completely free and refuses to accept the possibility of being prevented from choosing his path. Brilliant pupils may feel that they have access to everything. Pupils in great difficulty may also consider their freedom to be total because they understand that they can register any wish on the platform. *Perception of parental influences:* 6 students recognize the influence of their parents. 5 admit to being influenced by their teachers. Finally, 7 students consider themselves to be one of their own influences.

2.1.2. Results of lexicometric analysis. *The CHD* analysis identifies 5 classes with a balanced distribution (between 15.4 and 19%) for 4 classes. Only one class (5) really stands out (32.5%). 1126 out of 1503 segments are classified in this class, i.e. 74.92% of the whole text corpus. The dendrogram shows the characteristic words of each class. An analysis of the terms by their Chi2 and p-value allows us to construct the themes of the classes.

Class 5 represents the difficulty of choosing ($\chi2 =15.503$; p<0.0001) a field ($\chi2 = 36.16$; p<0.0001) in which the student can work ($\chi2 =28.427$; p<0.0001). The importance of associating information about one's own future education ($\chi2 = 0.389$; p= 0.533), one's own future ($\chi2 = 4.907$; p= 0.027) and one's own history is again evident.

In class 3, there are strong negative connotations (regret ($\chi2 = 20.363$; p<0.0001) related to both the perception of being forced ($\chi2 = 9.902$; p=0.002) to choose in the "senior year" ($\chi2 = 10.371$; p=0.001) and the pressure of not being able to "change" ($\chi2 =16.781$; p<0.0001) one's choice.

Class 2 represents what is involved in thinking about a project (thinking $\chi2 = 17.108$, p<0.0001), (project $\chi2 = 125.284$, p=0.003). In this case, according to the students, help is needed (help $\chi2 = 44.385$, p<0.0001) to ensure a realistic project (true $\chi2 = 17.108$, p<0.0001). The word 'talk' appears in the class graph ($\chi2 = 95.858$), but not significantly (p=0.195). However, the class graph shows a central value. The teacher ($\chi2 = 0.004$, p<0.0001) is used only to a limited extent, although he seems to be of prime importance (in this class as in others). It helps by providing information ($\chi2 = -0.546$, p<0.0001), but this doesn't seem to be enough. For example, the arousal of passions ($\chi2 = -1.463$, p<0.0001) (to love $\chi2 = -4.196$, p<0.0001) seems to be lacking in the construction of projects by high school students. The relationship of trust ($\chi2 = 26.092$, p=0.086) also seems to be missing.

Class 4 collects a list of dynamic verbs (push ($\chi2 = 14.679$; p<0.0001) linked to the anxiety of waiting for Parcoursup results and seeing one's name on the list ($\chi2 = 5.799$; p=0.016). These dynamic verbs are also associated with actions related to information about training courses ("sites") ($\chi2 = 19.768$; p<0.0001). Stress ($\chi2 = 53.379$; p<0.0001) seems to be related to both the senior year and the projection towards the college years. The "class" group ($\chi2 = 85.662$; p <0.0001) represents the functions of the classmate, both in terms of the possibility of feeding one's "motivation" ($\chi2 = 3.492$; p= 0. 151), in terms of this partner sometimes being present since "primary school" ($\chi2 = 5.247$; p= 0.022), but also in terms of the possibility of "confrontation" ($\chi2 = 2.182$; p= 0.14). In this case, the classmate is still seen as a member of the class group or even as a "person" ($\chi2 = 15.909$; p<0.0001). But it seems to be far from what the student recognizes as a friend ($\chi2 = 14.662$; p<0.0001). This class group is used to "invest" ($\chi2 = 5.009$; p= 0.025) in questions and exchanges about the "world" ($\chi2 = 3.804$; p= 0. 051), and the pupils understand this investment as being made by the "teacher" ($\chi2 = 2.886$; p= 0.089), and in particular by his ability to encourage ($\chi2 = 26.571$; p<0.0001). Only the teacher appears in this class4.

In class 1, the term "see" is central ($\chi2 = 44.316$) but not significant (p=0.227). We can hypothesize that this is due to a verbal tic, but also to the fact that high school students talk more about not being able to see. The class diagram clearly shows its centrality, and the theme (vision of the future, lack of transparency of the course) also reflects the difficulty of seeing. In other words, although this concept is expected in this class, it is underrepresented. Similarly, high school students expressed a lack of transparency, a lack of clarity about the Parcoursup "platform" ($\chi2 = 5.155$; p= 0.46). Thinking ($\chi2 = 4.37$; p=0.037) about one's orientation ($\chi2 = 36.887$; p<0.001) based on what one likes ($\chi2 = 33.605$; p=0.041) seems complex. To promote this better vision of one's own choice of guidance ($\chi2 = 3.008$; p<0.0001), the main teacher ($\chi2 = 3.327$; p= 0.005) seems to be central when he/she promotes a relationship of trust ($\chi2 = 26.092$; p<0.0001). This class shows that the information concerns the knowledge of possible training courses, the functioning of the platform and the relational dimension of the student with his/her referent.

A CFA revealed a similarity of active forms for classes 1 and 2. In this case, these similarities imply that a clear vision of one's guidance project and the verbalization of one's project are interdependent. Finally, the graph for the word "renounce" shows us how closely it is linked to the unspeakable and to loneliness. The graph for "choose", on the other hand, shows a strong verbalization.

3. Discussion

The environment is enabling when it develops the agency of the individual (Fernagu-Oudet, 2014). In this way, it supports the development of self-determination to "construct one's choices" (Fernagu, 2022), both individually and collectively, both in "their knowledge, their health, their success and their progress" (Arnoud and Falzon, 2013). Indeed, the support of adults promotes the development of the professional identity of teenagers. To this end, Chen and Solberg (2017) specify that this support must be caring and engaged. It's not just any adult, as the latter must be a 'referent adult', i.e. 'parents, guardians, teachers, school counsellors and mentors'. In the context of our study, we find elements that confirm this "support" through the perceptions of support experienced by the students, but it differs according to the referent: in this case, the teacher and the father exercise a form of support by transmitting personalized information on training courses. Mothers and PsyEN, on the other hand, provide a "caring" type of support: less focused on information and more on "caring". In this case they are concerned with the psychological health of the

student. An empowering environment promotes the capability to choose oneself. However, students perceive different forms of support depending on whether it comes from the teacher, father, mother or PsyEN. When pupils express the absence of support from their parents, teacher or PsyEN, they may be expressing their capability because they benefit from the support of one of them. More precisely, in the field of guidance, support can appear to be interchangeable. Identity construction and career decisions are presented as correlated in numerous studies (Lannegrand and Perchec 2016, Porfeli et al. 2011). In our study, vocational identity is what characterizes the psychic resource necessary for the emergence of the capability to make your own choices. Diffused identity characterizes a student without commitment or exploration. A foreclosed identity characterizes a student who is prematurely committed without any exploration. A moratorium identity is a student in exploration without commitment. Finally, an achieved identity is a student who has committed after exploring all possibilities. In this case, a disabling environment limits the individual's psychological resources and therefore his capability to choose himself. The sense of freedom, the expression of self-determination and intrinsic motivation are closely linked to vocational identity (Lannegrand and Perchec, 2017). This identity, in turn, is linked to the environment in which it is deployed. When this environment is enabling, it promotes the development of vocational identity. Conversely, when the environment is disabling, it limits the development of vocational identity. In our study, vocational identity seems to be related to the perception of freedom, self-determination and intrinsic motivation. The more the identity is achieved, the more likely the individual is to feel free, self-determined and motivated. The theoretical framework of Sen's Capability Approach allows us to understand how an enabling environment promotes the ability to orient oneself. Indeed, an enabling environment promotes the development of the psychic resources necessary for the expression of agency.

4. Conclusion

We have seen in this study that the environment is enabling when it promotes the development of a vocational identity. This identity is what allows the individual to express his or her capability to make a decision oneself. The more this identity is achieved, the more likely the individual is to feel free, self-determined and motivated. An enabling environment is one that supports the development of this identity. If the environment is disabling, it limits the development of vocational identity. As a result, the individual is unable to express his or her capability for self-direction. In this case, he or she will only experience formal freedom, i.e. the absence of real freedom. From these findings we can conclude that vocational identity is a key element in understanding the capability to make a decision oneself. It is therefore essential to take into account the environment in which the individual develops in order to support the development of this identity. This is particularly important in the context of guidance, where the expression of capability plays a crucial rule in the success of the individual. In this study, the environment is perceived as facilitating when it supports the development of a vocationnal identity. This identity is what enables the individual to express their capability to make decisions for themselves. The more this identity is developed, the more likely the individual is to feel partially free, empowered and motivated.

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