

# The Crisis of Schooling?



The Crisis of Schooling?  
Learning, Knowledge and Competencies  
in Modern Societies

Edited by

José Manuel Resende and Maria Manuel Vieira

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

---

P U B L I S H I N G

The Crisis of Schooling? Learning, Knowledge and Competencies in Modern Societies,  
Edited by José Manuel Resende and Maria Manuel Vieira

This book first published 2009

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2009 by José Manuel Resende and Maria Manuel Vieira and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system,  
or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or  
otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-0957-8, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-0957-3

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables.....	vii
Introduction .....	1
José Resende and Maria Manuel Vieira	
<b>Part I: School Formation, Personal Development and Labour Market – Educational Policies in Review</b>	
Chapter One.....	9
The Worlds of Lifelong Learning: An Interpretative Proposal of the Portuguese EU Level III Key-Competences Referential Alexandre Cotovio Martins	
Chapter Two .....	25
Personal Development Planning in Higher Education: Localised Thinking for a Globalised World James Moir	
Chapter Three .....	49
The School Put to the Test by the Labour Market: The Case of Education and Training Courses in Portuguese Education System Pedro Caetano	
<b>Part II: Actual Challenges and Professional Dilemmas of School Actors – Results of Empirical Studies</b>	
Chapter Four.....	69
Guidance Experts and their School Worlds: Criticism, Denunciation, Engagement, Resignation Bruno Dionísio	

Chapter Five .....	79
Political Socialization and School Justice: The Point of View of Secondary School Teachers in Portugal José Manuel Resende	
Chapter Six .....	93
Representations of Secondary Education Teachers Regarding School Rankings – Notes of an Empirical Research Maria Benedita Portugal e Melo	
<b>Part III: Self-Determination Identity Processes towards School Trajectories</b>	
Chapter Seven.....	107
A Backstage Look at Student Self-Determination: The Role of Parents and Schooling Options Maria Manuel Vieira	
Chapter Eight.....	121
Practical Knowledge, Autonomy in Learning and Responsibility at Work: The Incomplete and Fragile Identity of Interns and Residents Catarina Delaunay	
Bibliography .....	137
Contributors.....	143

## LIST OF TABLES

1-1 The Grammar of the Project-Oriented Justificatory Regime.....	14
1-2 The <i>Cité de projet</i> in the Portuguese EU Level III KCR: A synoptic view 20.....	20
2-1 Perceived Benefits of PDP .....	30
2-2 Perceived Problems of PDP .....	32
2-3 Perceptions of Elements within PDP.....	36
2-4 Views on Existing PDPs .....	37
2-5 Views on what should be included in a PDP.....	40
2-6 Student Views on PDP .....	43
2-7 Comparative analysis about views on PDPs .....	45
4-1 Some Justice School models and critical competences of professionals.....	75
6-1 Most important functions within basic and secondary education according to teachers' opinion.....	96
6-2 Opinion of teachers regarding the negative aspects of the 12th grade national exams compulsoriness .....	98
6-3 The most important condition according to the teachers for the students to obtain good results in the 12th grade exams.....	98
6-4 Opinion of teachers regarding the influence of the school ranking in the way they proceeded their teaching the 12th grade.....	100





# INTRODUCTION

JOSÉ RESENDE AND MARIA MANUEL VIEIRA

Proceeding from the current mutations which accelerate the individualization process in contemporary societies and following the transformations raised by the issue of an “organized modernity” (Wagner, 1996) in large groups, the social theory has been rehearsing renewed meanings of contemporaneity.

For some authors, in the end of the 20th century, the outlines of an emerging “wide liberal” (Wagner, 1996) modernity is becoming visible. The increase of social reflexivity (Giddens, 2000) not only associated with school progress but also with the reinforcement of “economy of knowledge and information” which configures a “network society” (Castells, 2005), provides from then on the necessary instruments to be used by individuals in their grounded actions. However, simultaneously, generalizing the access to knowledge, the institutions of modernity begin delegating to the individual a good part of the institutional work which formerly was relied upon them. Thus, the ability of self-determination proves to be a vital competence for the modern citizen – and an essential socializing objective. It also implies the personal liability of his choices – whether or not successful.

The generalization of expert knowledge also confronts the individual with a sharper perception of the “risks” (Beck, 1992) related to his action, which cannot help generating insecurity and ambivalence feelings to be managed by himself.

The dynamics of schooling and learning are privileged domains for the research of the issues previously mentioned. As they represent an essential feature – and mandatory – of socializing processes in contemporary societies, they gather the challenges and ambivalences related to the production of individuals in modernity. Furthermore, these dynamics occur in a context of enlarged globalization, despite implying specific local translations, often composite.

In fact, the educational landscapes of modern societies have been in a transformation process since the ‘60s, not only from the morphological point of view but also from the curricular designs’, interfering directly in

students' learning. Despite this feature, common to all modern societies, the changes within their educational systems present distinct rates and intensities.

Nevertheless, it is worth noticing that this movement of political and institutional changes is not a linear and sequential process. In fact, meaningful differences are to be enhanced, either in unequally developed countries or in regions geographically situated both north and south of the equator. Beyond the specificity of the history of political dynamics promoted by local elites who shape the political configurations of national education, the political and economic integration processes of internationally renowned countries are not identical. They differ, whether in terms of cooperative amplitude or in terms of their normative typology, or even of their institutional geography.

The different adjustment in establishing regional, intercontinental or global political agreements, in several domains but especially at an educational level, forces their real replica to show distinct rhythms and degrees at a regional and national level. Thus, in spite of there being within the "wide liberal modernity" (Wagner, 1996) a growing effort from political and technical elites working in several international institutions (spokespersons of the United Nations or of regionally grouped Nations, according to their geographical localization or their economic development), to alert national political elites to the problems, obstacles and challenges their educational systems face, their immediate translation into local political measures is not achieved at the same rhythm or intensity everywhere.

The devices of international regulation of educational spheres have increased, following the new moral issues introduced by the "new spirit of capitalism" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999). Namely in what usually concerns crisis diagnosis almost permanently faced by school systems in economically developed countries. Despite the growing direct or indirect regulation produced by statements, reports or external consultancies, demanded by national political and technical elites, the interpretation of their data and conclusions give rise to often disagreeing points of view at an international, regional and local level. The assumption of the agreement or disagreement with these perspectives and proposed guidelines, namely in inference matrices unveiled by these political and technical reports, mainly depends on the major or minor proximity and ideological accordance among the different elite groups, especially among their most influential segments in these translation processes from transnational to national plan.

In fact, it is not possible to deny the growing relevance of evaluation devices of national educational policies from external entities. Whether or not integrated in the European Community, these entities tend to evaluate them by their results.

Among the results mostly underlined by these technicians are the potentialities shown by national educational systems in adapting to the demands of work and employment markets. One of the reasons mainly stressed for structural unemployment within modern societies is precisely the contemporary school's "inability" to produce graduates who will respond to the economic challenges of a more and more global economy. Less concerned about the redistribution of school diplomas, according to school levels and rankings, these experts focus all their attention in the efficiency of school systems, whether concerning failure rates or the quality and quantity of learning, or even what concerns the permanence in school of unsuccessful students and their professional qualification.

This way, by means of political guidance provided by supranational entities and also by interference of these regulation devices, via evaluation of school results, issues related to knowledge, learning and competences appear as central concerning axes of the State and emerge as controversial focuses within the public sphere.

In fact, the centrality of knowledge and information today is frequently stressed, whether in the Media or in political or economic territories. As it happened in the past, today the human capital figure has become recurrent again. Yet, today arguments are presented in a different manner. Giving a reason for the criticism addressed to the absence of creativity, innovation and flexibility within school learning contexts, investing in human capital now would involve applying those missing competences in school.

The organization of this book intends to recover three major areas of articulation between global and local, bearing school systems in mind.

The first part focuses on school formation, personal development and work market and the three included chapters debate some of the current tendencies of educational policies concerning individuals' qualification.

The first chapter included in the discussion on "lifelong learning" deals with adult formation and school recognition of "competences". Furthermore, the author discusses the relations within work, non-school learning contexts and formal classic education modalities through the analysis of the guide-document "competences referential" which frames the adult formation programme "New Opportunities".

In the second chapter James Moir reflects upon a modality of "working the other out" seeking the personal development of High Education

students. In this case, it is supposed to analyse a programme (Personal Development Planning) taking place in the United Kingdom aiming to promote self-determination and competition competences in a globalised work market for young University students.

The final chapter of this first part focuses on another school population – academically unsuccessful students and/or at risk of dropping out. Pedro Caetano studies the school transformation of academic failure in successful professional qualification, by transferring the emphasis on school knowledge to values and attitudes. The case of “Education and Formation Courses” destined for these students’ profile will be closely analysed.

The second part of this work reflects about some of the professional challenges and dilemmas which school actors presently face. In this case, it will be observed the way globally inspired educational policies are built every day through the action of characters in the local field.

Bruno Dionísio puts forward two challenges present in career guiding professionals at work – the search for the fairest school guidance on the one hand; the team coordination with other school professionals on the other hand – on the pretext of studying the identity and practice of these experts.

The fifth chapter focuses on the controversies about the (un)fulfilment of one of the promises of educational modernity – the political socialization of youths – from the teaching professionals’ point of view. More specifically, the author proposes an analysis of critical operations performed by public school teachers concerning the State programme of “education for citizenship” taking place in Portuguese basic schools.

The next chapter retakes the teachers’ point of view, this time to equate another dilemma. It is a question of understanding, within the context of teachers’ performance evaluation, how the growing responsibility for the results, associated with the duty of publicly justifying their actions, is influent on their identity and professional practice. The publicity of school rankings by the Media will be the motive for the debate of these issues.

The last part of this work is dedicated to the identity self-determination processes in contrast with school paths. The focus shifts from the educational policies and their local translation through their professionals’ practice to the performers of educational action themselves. It is time to analyse how the individual creates his biography within institutional contexts – in this case a learning context – and how that creation gathers the multiple social experiences in which he is inscribed.

Chapter seven tries to account for the parental supporting work to their children’s self-determination at school expressed by the choice of a

course. Here the author demonstrates how the autonomy revealed by an individual option materialized in school guidance is much more supported in others' work than it seems to be its justification of the choice, apparently vocational.

Finally, Catarina Delaunay's text explores self-determination dimensions in the learning sphere, yet dealing with different performers. In this case, it is a matter of apprehending the consequences of differential framings in professional practice and tutorial support in hospital context about the identity dynamics and the acquisition processes of knowledge and competences of Medical Interns and Residents.

With this anthology we intend to contribute to the debate about education and formation systems in modernity. As revealed, the new challenges and dynamics which approach the educational sphere overcome today the boundaries of each Nation State in a large scale and surpass, by far, the narrow space of formal school learning. The magnitude and complexity of the emerging issues within this area stimulate the posing of new questions and defy the theoretical-methodological imagination of social researchers. A vast study field is still to be explored.



**PART I:**

**SCHOOL FORMATION,  
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT  
AND LABOUR MARKET –  
EDUCATIONAL POLICIES IN REVIEW**





## CHAPTER ONE

# THE WORLDS OF LIFELONG LEARNING: AN INTERPRETATIVE PROPOSAL OF THE PORTUGUESE EU LEVEL III KEY-COMPETENCES REFERENTIAL

ALEXANDRE COTOVIO MARTINS<sup>1</sup>

### **An interpretative framework for action: the regimes of engagement in action**

The analytical perspective here used is what one of its proponents calls the sociology of the regimes of engagement in action (Thévenot, 2006a). According to authors such as Thévenot and Boltanski (Thévenot, *op.cit.*, Boltanski e Thévenot, 1991), individuals seek to coordinate their actions with others through different “access modes” into that same action. For Laurent Thévenot, these “access modes” might be understood as different regimes of engagement in action. In the author’s words (Thévenot, 2006b):

“My approach aims to account not only the movements of an actor, but also the way his environment responds to him and the way he takes into account these responses. (...) The dynamics of this material engagement between an agent and his environment is a central issue in my conception of pragmatic regimes. Differentiating regimes brings to light variations in the relevant reality which is put to a test in the dynamics of each kind of pragmatic engagement”.

The main differentiating axis for the regimes of engagement in action within this perspective consists in, according to Thévenot, the evaluation or *judgment* the individuals make, in a given situation, of their own conduct—seeking for an *appropriate* action for the specific situation—and the *support* that evaluation or judgment finds in the situation itself (Cfr. *Idem*).

Within these analytical parameters, Thévenot identifies three different regimes of engagement in action, which range from a more personal and intimate form of engagement to a more general and rational space of conventional constraints (typical of the public sphere). Thus, the author singles out three major regimes of engagement within an axis that ranges from individual to general: *family*, *plan* and *public*, differentiated by the evaluation an individual makes of the most convenient approach to each situation, according to the generality of the perceived relationships between the beings (humans and non humans) in presence.

Thévenot (2006b) describes familiar, the first of these regimes, thus:

“The regime of familiar engagement maintains a personalized, localized good: feeling at ease. The well-being experienced in comfortable because familiar human and material surroundings is heavily dependent on the person who has come to accommodate himself in and feel comfortable in them, and on the path by which he familiarized himself with a milieu shaped by continued use. This good is more than a fixed habit because it involves a dynamic relation with an immediate milieu that is experienced”.

In this regime, we're in the presence of a familiar world in which agents engage in action through a very “intimate” approach. This engagement does not involve the need to place under any principle of equivalence the human beings and objects at play. As such, the proximity sphere might be best exemplified by the trivial relationships established with objects and people we know well. One such example can be found on that simple action of hitting the car's dashboard, with the reasonable expectation that this will turn on the speedometer light, as it has in the past. This gesture would be difficult to explain to someone else, mainly for moral reasons (“you shouldn't hit the car like that, it might damage it”). In this regime, even verbal language has a non-analytical nature and might even appear strange, given it's intrinsically general character (the word “cup” designates all possible cups and there is always a deviation from this specific cup that I'm now holding which seems to elude language).

The plan regime, in turn, requires an increase in the level of generalization of the relationships between the people and objects at play, as it extends beyond the intimate circle of close habituation-driven solidarities (Cfr. *idem*):

“The regime of engagement in a plan corresponds to a level of engagement so frequently used that the specificity of this means of apprehending the relation between the human being and surrounding reality may well remain invisible. This is why we can also speak here of “normal action,” or the

“normal format” of action. The good in this engagement also tends to get lost in the ordinary idea of an accomplished action, especially since the widely used vocabulary of ‘needs’ and ‘utility’ neutralizes the form of evaluation specific to this engagement. (...) The plan intention cannot be experienced without recognition that environmental components have a functional capacity—this is what ensures the type of guarantee particular to this regime. The object thus grasped confers its solidity on the plan intention while facilitating agent’s control of plan execution. Analysis of this regime of engagement brings out the complementarity between agent’s power as an individual engaged in realizing his project and a grasp of the object in functional terms”.

The plan regime is frequently identified with a *functional* action in face of a more or less explicit project. In this case, both objects and humans tend to be apprehended in action according to expectations within the situation, evoking “plans” which are more or less shared by all the participants.

Finally, the public regime is the most general in terms of how individuals evaluate and coordinate their actions in a given situation. In this regime, engagement is qualified through an order of legitimate worth, which is a specification of common good. According to Thévenot (2006b):

“[This regime] is oriented by demands of a public order, since the evaluation must be valid for a third party and characterized by generality and legitimacy. This is the level which is most demanding with regard to the equivalency required by commonizing. Luc Boltanski and I (...) brought to light the demands made by the sense of justice common to all orders of legitimate worth involving specification of a common good (...). In [this regime], the relevant reality is grasped according to a cognitive format grounded on the conventional qualifications of persons and things”.

### **The public regime and the *Cité* by projects**

Under the constraints of the public regime of action, Boltanski and Thévenot identify a number of different orders of worth, by which social actors qualify their own as well as others’ actions. These orders of worth, which the authors name as *Cités*, are thus sets of conventional qualifications by which actors justify or criticize their own as well as others’ actions.

Among these different orders, Luc Boltanski and Éve Chiapello (1999) identify one particular *Cité*, which they argue to be one of the main sources of justifications in the context of advanced capitalism: the order of *project*. In fact, trying to analyze the recent developments of capitalistic

societies, these authors observe the emergence of a widespread set of conventions, which constitute a legitimate order of worth in these societies, by which capitalism tends to justify its existence. The authors call to the process by which this new order emerges the rise of a *new spirit of capitalism*, to retake and reformulate the old weberian expression. As these sociologists put it (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2002):

“[The] study of changes in the spirit of capitalism has revealed a major reorganization in dominant value systems. In our opinion, this provides a very interesting explanation for the absence of any critical resistance throughout the 1980’s, and at least until the mid-1990’s, to the capitalist sphere. If we consider that criticisms are usually made in the name of values that are deemed to have been betrayed by the capitalist process, any major transformation of a value system serving as a justification for a capitalist world is apt, at least temporarily, to disorient critical activities”.

Boltanski and Chiapello, on the other hand, strive to make clear that their analysis leads them to understand that this “spirit of capitalism”, now regenerated, is not by any means a mere “superstructure” or epiphenomenal event, but is at the very core of the development of the capitalistic process, precisely because capitalism highly needs some form of social justification (Cfr. *idem*):

“In many ways, capitalism is an absurd system: wage-earners have lost their ownership of the fruits of their labor as well as any hope of ever working other than as someone else’s subordinate. As for capitalists, they find themselves chained to a never-ending and insatiable process. For both of these protagonists, being part of the process of capitalism is remarkably lacking in justification. Capitalistic accumulation requires commitment of many people, although few have any real chances of making a substantial profit. Many will be scarcely tempted to get involved in this system, and might even develop decidedly adverse feelings. This is an especially thorny problem in modern economies that require a high level of commitment from their employees, in particular from managers”.

What the authors say is that during the last decades (mostly from the 1980’s), the “spirit of capitalism” and so the conventional orders by which capitalistic processes’ protagonists conceive, qualify and justify their actions changed, giving birth to what they call *la Cité de projet*, the conventional order “by project”. The authors think this birth occurred, primarily, by a change in the way capitalist firms looked upon themselves (Cfr. Boltanski and Chiapello, 2002):

“[The analysis led us] to conclude that a new representation of the firm has emerged, featuring an organization that is very flexible; organized by projects; works in a network; features few hierarchical levels; where a logic of transversal flows has replaced a more hierarchical one, etc. This new representation contrasts specifically with a former representation of the firm, one that had focused on an organization which is hierarchical, integrated and geared towards the internal realization of activities (vertical integration)”.

This *Cité* is characterized by a set of features, which closely follow the model which Boltanski and Thévenot built in their book *De la justification*. A *Cité*, according to these authors, is a conventional social construct which actors use to reach *agreements* as well as support *criticism* in social life. These constructs are *legitimate orders* in which actors base themselves to operate justification actions in their everyday life.

These justificatory systems, according to Boltanski and Thévenot, are built upon basic “grammars” which specify (Cfr. 2002):

- a) an *equivalency principle* (in reference to which an evaluation can be made of all actions, things and persons for that particular *Cité*);
- b) a *state of greatness*, a “great one” being a person who strongly embodies the *Cité*’s values, and the *state of smallness*, defined as lack of greatness;
- c) a definition of what is important to each world in terms of categories of objects (the *directory of objects and devices*), human beings (the *directory of subjects*), and verbs (*natural relationships between beings*), signalling relationships which are specific to each form of greatness;
- d) a *greatness ratio* specifying the nature of relationships between the great and the small, especially the way “great” persons, because they contribute to the common good, are of use to “small” persons;
- e) a *format of investment*, this being a major pre-condition for each *Cité*’s stability since, by linking greatness to sacrifice (which takes a specific form in each *Cité*), it ensures that all rights are offset by responsibilities;
- f) a *paradigmatic test* which, for each justificatory regime, best reveals a person’s greatness;
- g) a *harmonious figure of natural order*, conveying the ideal-types that correspond to the universes within which there has been a fair distribution of the quality of *greatness* (Cfr. Boltanski and Chiapello, 2002).

According to Boltanski and Chiapello, the *Cité de projet* distinguishes itself from other justificatory orders present in modern societies and by reference to these latter points, in the particular way that the Table 1 tries to condensate:

Table 1-1 The Grammar of the Project-Oriented Justificatory Regime

<b>Equivalency Principle (General Standard):</b> activity; project initiation; remote links between people
<b>A State of Smallness:</b> inability to get involved, to trust in others, to communicate; close-mindedness, prejudice, authoritarianism, intolerance, stability, over-reliance on one's roots, rigidity...
<b>A State of Greatness:</b> adaptability, flexibility, polyvalence; sincerity in face to face encounters; ability to spread the benefits of social connections, to generate enthusiasm and to increase teammates' employability
<b>Directory of Subjects:</b> managers, coaches, innovators
<b>Directory of Objects:</b> computer and information technologies. New organisational devices (subcontracting, flexibility, outsourcing, autonomous units, franchises...)
<b>Natural Relationship:</b> trusting and being trustworthy; ability to communicate; adaptability to others' needs
<b>Greatness ratio:</b> "great" persons enhance "small" persons' employability in return for their trust and enthusiasm for project work (i.e., their ability to take part in another project)
<b>Format of Investment:</b> ready to sacrifice all that could curtail one's availability, giving up lifelong plans
<b>Standard (Paradigmatic) Test:</b> ability to move from one project to another
<b>Harmonious Figure of Natural Order:</b> where the world's natural form resembles that of a network

Source: Boltanski and Chiapello (2002)

In this justificatory regime, thus, *activity* is the general standard, the principle by which, in last resource, actors qualify their actions. This activity, on the other hand, must pass by the engagement in networks, seen as the *natural* infrastructure of societies (Castells, 1996) and mostly in networked projects. To accomplish this engagement, individuals must be flexible, adaptable and polyvalent. People need to be *employable* or able to increase others' employability, according to their specific position in the socio-economic system.

It's also important to note that in this order, *activity* has distinctive features from other forms of capitalistic activity, namely the *industrial* form (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2002):

“Contrary to what happens in the Industrial Cité - where activity means ‘work’ and being active means ‘holding a steady and wage-earning

position' - in the Project-oriented Cité, activity overcomes the oppositions between work and no-work, steady and unsteady, paid and unpaid, profit-sharing and volunteer work, and between that which can be measured in terms of productivity and that which cannot be assessed in terms of accountable performances”.

The relative absence of opposition between formal and informal or non-formal spheres of activity is, as we shall see, at the principle of several beliefs and organization principles in the sphere of European learning policies.

### **The new spirit of capitalism in lifelong learning policies: a general glance**

We tried to give above a broad but superficial view of how capitalistic systems developed, in the last 30 years, a new social ideology, based in a large conventional order, anchored in a restricted set of symbolic operators, as for example the principle of *activity*, namely networked activity, *adaptability*, *flexibility* or permanent availability to engage in new experiences.

These principles, above identified and which are suited to characterize what Boltanski and Chiapello name as *the new spirit of capitalism* form a set of social conventions, a social order of legitimacy, which tends to pervade social contexts in advanced modern societies. The same is to say that the cognitive and evaluative traits, as well as the correspondent forms of social action, which structure this set of conventions can be found not only in the properly speaking capitalistic firms and agents and directly associated social relations, but also in other contexts within these societies. In this paper, we are trying to demonstrate, through exemplification, that this order of legitimacy is widespread in our societies and became even quite discernible in some systems of beliefs and actions within the public, political sphere. This is the case, we think, of lifelong learning European policies.

In fact, notions as *lifelong learning* or informal and non-formal learning contexts became, throughout the last decade, recurrent themes on European public entities' discourses, whether they may be national or not. Underlying these notions, we often seem to identify the idea that one's professional, familiar or interpersonal experience in modern European societies and its contexts is, by itself, *qualifying*. Thus, the relations between work, non-school learning contexts and classic educational forms suffer, in public leaders' beliefs and actions, significant transformations. Among them, it seems to gain strength the belief that learning, as it's

experienced by modern individuals in these “qualifying” societies, might function for many as the fertile soil to construct themselves an alternative path to *citizenship*, along or in concurrence with classic education, as it is said to promote one’s *employability* and *adaptability* to uncertain contexts of action and work. From this standpoint, it’s often argued by public authorities that to *recognize* and to *certify* lifelong acquired *competences* is a matter of promoting citizenship.

These beliefs are quite clearly condensed in the document *A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (EC, 2000), text produced by the Commission of the European Communities, willing to serve as a reference for policy-making in this area in Europe at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This document is said to promote the necessary view of education needed in the sequence of the major changes occurred in the world, which are said to lead societies and economies, namely the European ones, to a *knowledge-based* pattern of growth and development. These changes, on the other hand, imply, according to the *Memorandum*, large restructurings, also at the level of individuals and of individual forms of dealing with knowledge in a global, unpredictable, diverse world. Thus, the *Memorandum* writers strive to make clear the need for a large European debate and political action in the field, justifying this need by two orders of reasons:

“[The first reason is that] Europe has moved towards a knowledge-based society and economy. More than ever before, access to up-to-date information and knowledge, together with the motivation and skills to use these resources intelligently on behalf of oneself and the community as a whole, are becoming the key to strengthening Europe’s competitiveness and improving the employability and adaptability of the workforce; § [The second reason is that] today’s Europeans live in a complex social and political world. More than ever before, individuals want to plan their own lives, are expected to contribute actively to society, and must learn to live positively with cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. Education, in its broadest sense, is the key to learning and understanding how to meet these challenges”.

These changes and the consequent *needs* of restructuring individual landscapes and actions in *societies of knowledge* pass by promoting individual *adaptability* to new and ever-changing, diverse contexts of action, which is also a mean of promoting *employability*, and, through this way, *citizenship*. The *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* (2005) is quite clear at this subject:



“The development of the knowledge society is raising demand for the key competences in the personal, public and professional spheres. The way in which people access information and services is changing, as are the structure and make-up of societies. There is increasing concern about social cohesion and developing democratic citizenship; this requires people to be informed, concerned and active. The knowledge, skills and attitudes that everyone needs are changing as a result. § The growing internationalisation of economies affects the world of work, with rapid and frequent change, the introduction of new technologies and new approaches to organising companies. Employees need both to update specific job-related skills and to acquire generic competences that enable them to adapt to change.

This concern with *adaptation, flexibility, polyvalence* and permanent *activity*, as an ability to permanently act in diverse contexts and constantly seek for new and recycled knowledge achieves its paroxysm in one of the *key competences* which this document identifies in the new knowledge-based contexts of action, the *Learning to learn* competence (Cfr. *idem*):

“‘Learning to learn’ is the ability to pursue and persist in learning. Individuals should be able to organise their own learning, including through effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups. Competence includes awareness of one’s learning process and needs, identifying available opportunities, and the ability to handle obstacles in order to learn successfully. It means gaining, processing and assimilating new knowledge and skills as well as seeking and making use of guidance. Learning to learn engages learners to build on prior learning and life experiences in order to use and apply knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts – at home, at work, in education and training. Motivation and confidence are crucial to an individual’s competence”.

The pervasive logic of *learning to learn* is, on the other hand, anchored on the notion that learning mustn’t be now conceived only as a *formal* activity, but also as an *informal* or *non-formal* one. This enlargement of the field of *learning activity* beneath its formal contexts is perfectly homologous to what Boltanski and Chiapello observe in the sphere of work (1999). From this standpoint, all social experiences become a fertile ground for the individual construction of personal adaptability to the ever-changing contexts of *knowledge societies*. The function of public entities in this context must pass, then, through *recognizing, validating* and *certifying* individuals’ lifelong learned competences, in order to *legitimate* their social experience as apt for the framework of knowledge societies. To recognize, validate and certify competences becomes a new form of *gate-keeping* and regulating access to a greater employability and thus to

citizenship (namely in the space of the different countries which constitute the European Union)<sup>2</sup> (CEC, 2004):

“In the context of the principle of learning throughout life, the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning aims to make visible and to value the full range of knowledge and competences held by an individual, irrespective of where or how these have been acquired. The identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning take place inside and outside formal education and training, in the workplace and in civil society. § Identification and validation are key instruments in enabling the transfer and acceptance of all learning outcomes across different settings. Identification records and makes visible the individual’s learning outcomes”.

## **The Portuguese EU Level III Key-Competences Referential**

### **General aspects**

Inspired by the general principles determined by the European Union political organs and made a reference to all national polities within the communitarian space, the *EU Level III Key-Competences Referential* (KRC) is the guiding document for the recognizing, validation and certification (RVC) processes at EU Level III of qualification in Portugal. This affiliation is clearly assumed in the presentation of this document (DGFV, 2006):

“The Level III Key-Competences Referential inscribes itself, clearly, on the communitarian recommendations in matter of valorisation and validation of non-formal and informal learning in a lifelong perspective”.

This document, made public by the Portuguese Government in 2006, is the basis for RVC Level III processes in Portugal, in the framework of the *New Opportunities* policy, which aims to overcome what is said to be an endemic underdevelopment of the country in what concerns adults’ qualification. The Referential is quite explicit on this matter (Cfr. *Idem*):

“Since the last decade, the policies and initiatives in the field of education and formation of adults in Portugal reflect the consciousness the country has (...) of the low levels of educational and professional certification of adult population. They reflect, equally, the effects of the new challenges which Portugal faces, in the context of the European bet on the transition to an economy of knowledge and of social cohesion. This strategic bet

presupposes the correlation among innovation, competitiveness, well-being levels, quality of life and education and formation of the population, capable of guaranteeing a sustained human development”.

The *Referential* consists in a wide set of competences, organized around three key-competences areas (DGFV, 2006): *Citizenship and professionalism*, *Society, technology and culture* and *Language, culture and communication*. Each one of these main competence areas is arranged in several levels, taken as “levels of complexity” of action, as *identification*, *comprehension* and *intervention*, among other distinctions which try to organize the RVC process and the work of RVC professionals.

In this paper, we will focus only on the presentation and justification texts which constitute the document, since it’s in these texts that the axial values, conceptions and conventions which guide the *Referential* are deployed. As the matter of fact, although the competences identified in the document are somewhat tributary of these values, conceptions and conventions, the presenting and justifying general first chapter of the document is where we can find them more explicitly worked out.

### **A space of conventions about lifelong learning**

The analysis here presented tries to demonstrate the presence of what Boltanski and Chiapello call *the new spirit of capitalism* in the Portuguese *EU Level II Key-Competences Referential (KCR)*. As we’ve already seen, this “spirit” and its integration in the learning processes of European populations is quite observable in the European documents which guide this *Referential*. In a stricter analysis, we will now show the results of a thematic analysis of this document, in two forms: i) a synoptic view of the *Referential*, under the viewpoint of the utmost categories which organize the *Cité de projets*, according to Boltanski and Chiapello; ii) a narrow description of how the main categories are structurally organized, recurring mostly to some examples selected from the KCR.

The synopsis synthesizes the basic symbolic operators which allow us to grasp the functioning of a legitimate order of worth which guides the speech in the analysed document, according to the “grid” of work provided by Boltanski and Chiapello. We thought that, in some cases, it would be necessary to grasp these symbolic operators in a stereoscopic way, because the document refers two figures that are central to the RVC process and must therefore be signalled distinctively: the *adult*, or the one which is trying to certificate his/her lifelong acquired competences, and the *RVC professionals*<sup>3</sup>, who support the adults’ effort and are able to recognize,

validate and certify his/her lifelong acquired competences, in the framework defined by the *Referential*.

Table 1-2 The *Cité de projet* in the Portuguese EU Level III KCR:  
A synoptic view

	<b>Adult</b>	<b>RVC Professionals</b>
<b>Equivalency Principle</b>	Activity in contexts of lifelong learning	RVC activity
<b>State of Smallness</b>	Unqualified / unschooled / inattentive to learning opportunities	-
<b>State of Greatness</b>	Adaptable / flexible / confident involved in learning processes / learning to learn / able to plan his/her learning processes / autonomous / in development / employable	Mediating / unveiling adults' life experiences / valorising adults' experiences / motivating and coaching for lifelong learning and learning to learn / mentoring
<b>Directory of Subjects</b>	Mediators (of his/her own / others' life experiences)	
<b>Directory of Objects</b>	Key-Competences Referential / Key-Competences	
<b>Natural Relationship</b>	Active participation in the search for knowledge, interacting with other adults	
<b>Greatness Ratio</b>	The Great supports the Small, unqualified, in his/her processes of qualification / RVC as a mentoring process	
<b>Format of Investment</b>	Lifelong learning / invest in him/herself as a learner / be responsible for his/her own learning development and employability / never give up learning	
<b>Standard Tests</b>	Return to the qualification system / actively participate in the search for knowledge / learn to learn	
<b>Harmonious Figure of Natural Order</b>	Networks / processes (in opposition to states)	

### **The *Cité de projet* in the Portuguese EU Level III KCR: a narrow overview**

In this section, we will try to rapidly condense some of the most relevant aspects of our analysis, by illustrating some of the points of the above synoptic view with examples from the KRC. We chose only some of the items of the synopsis, for economy of space. We tried to describe those categories which are central for at least a general comprehension of

the conventional structures we're dealing with and the ways by which these structures deploy themselves on the speech of the KCR writers. We shall remark that we don't have enough space to justify our options, but the descriptions must be sufficiently clear to allow the interested reader to confront our options with the KCR itself.

**i) *Equivalency Principle***

The equivalency principle of *activity* is here apprehended in two dimensions, one related to the *adult* and other to the *RVC professional*. On the first dimension, activity is seen as

“An integrating part of everyday life and which takes place in real context as an integrating part of the participation in social life. The learning process, consisting on the reflection, deepening and conceptualization of acquired experiences by interaction with others, dims and deconstructs the polarization between formal and informal learning contexts (p.15)”.

On the second dimension, activity is seen as

“An innovative process which happens essentially in the sequence of lifelong learning and vocational training strategies. It isn't only about translating more or less formalized scholar acquisitions and knowledge but also to depart from individuals' life trajectories to extract from them, in a contextualized and specialized manner, the solutions of action used in the most diverse situations of their courses and contexts (p.12)”.

**ii) *State of Smallness***

We've only identified a more explicit state of smallness applicable to the adult. In the KCR, the small is the unqualified, unschooled, inattentive to learning opportunities adult:

“We recognize that globally the main constraint with which adults' education and formation struggles (...) [is] the elevated number of low-scholarity-level-bearing adults. This circumstance, (...) constitutes a deficit, which reverberates in a limited search for education and formation among the less schooled (p.11)”.

**iii) *State of Greatness***

The state of greatness may also be observed in two dimensions, one referred to the *adult* and other to the *RVC professional*. On the first dimension, the *great one* may be described as follows:

“The evaluation that the learner makes of his/her apprenticeship is interdependent of the auto-confidence feeling, which translates the trust in his/her own competences: ‘I know that I can write a text without mistakes... I can solve this mathematical problem’. Auto-efficacy is related with the individual’s self-image, as an autonomous being based on his/her experiences, as individual in permanent updating; the interest in learning is related to social participation and (...) in the ability to concentrate on problems. Auto-efficacy converges, ultimately, in constructing knowledge by the communitarian practice of citizenship of learners and their social experience as individuals (pp.15-16)”.

On the second dimension the great one is who can

“Situate [him/herself] before a subtle dialectic between two functions: recognizing and validating. In what respects recognizing, its articulation with validation serves to empower its portability, its value of use. This is (...) a complex process of human relation which appeals to a proper culture, demanding a general mobilization of the perceptions between the individual, the other and the environment (p.17). [The RVC professional/process must] support [the adults] in (re)designing their courses of personal and professional development (...), legitimating and certifying those competences (p.12)”.

#### *iv) Greatness Ratio*

The greatness ratio consists in the support the RVC professional gives (while representing political options<sup>4</sup>) to the adult, coaching and leading the latter to his/her own improvement:

“[The] challenge which compromises education and vocational training [is to create such conditions to each citizen that he/she] (...) incorporates a multiplicity of competences which enable him/her to think, to know, to be, to make and to be with others (p.18)”.

### **Final words**

This brief paper had as principal purpose to unravel some basic though structural aspects that an analysis of the European strategy for lifelong learning according to the *économie des conventions* framework could suggest. There wasn’t any intention of making a more systematic or in-depth analysis. Thus, what we tried to do was mostly open the field to ulterior sociological research in this particular domain.

As the matter of fact, the *économie des conventions* framework seems to be particularly suited to sociologically interpret this European strategy. The possibility of making a systematic analysis of the relations between