

Bowling Together

*Lifelong Learning as a
Collective Challenge in
the North and the South*



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Lifelong Learning as a Collective Challenge in the North and the South

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Dedicated to Mpho Johannes Sekgololo and Tebogo Mothiba

Rector Magnificus, ladies and gentlemen

1. Introduction

In his study 'Bowling Alone' Robert Putnam (2000) analyses the individualisation processes in the United States during the last decades. He shows that in everyday life people are more and more obliged to deal with other people who they fear, dislike or simply don't understand. In Putnam's view, people who are confronted with these challenges are inclined to withdraw from those who are different, eventually even leading to visiting the bowling centre alone.

In his most recent book 'Together'. The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation (2012), Richard Sennett discusses Putnam's work and notices yet another development in contemporary society. Referring to the currently dominant neo-liberal politics he observes a growing economic inequality in the developed and developing countries. This process of increasing inequality was recently demonstrated empirically by Thomas Piketty (2014), especially as evident in the United States and France. Sennett refers to the example of the expectations of a truck driver and of a banker in the United States who share little common ground; and, we could add, the life of an official in Kampala shares very little with that of a rural young woman who sells her crops in the crowded centre of that same city. This social distance makes ordinary people angry with 'us-against-them-thinking as a rational result' (Sennett, 2012: 34). It could be added that *inequality* has devastating consequences for access to education and work and this will be the focus of my lecture. Making the jump to modern labour, Sennett observes further that both the desire and the capacity to cooperate with those who differ have weakened. Short-term jobs replace long-term careers within a single organisation. Flexibilisation makes it harder for each individual to develop what, in line with Sennett, could be called: a meaningful *learn-and-work biography*.

The modern, globalised society produces a new human profile: assertive, autonomous, self-responsible and maintaining superficial contact with the others. In the words of Sennett: "*We are losing the skills of cooperation needed to make a complex society work*" (Sennett, 2012: 9). The withdrawal described by Putnam is one way of dealing with these challenges. As a way out Sennett suggests *cooperation* – in other words - 'bowling together'. He looks at how cooperation is shaped, weakened and strengthened to conclude that "*people's capacities for cooperation are far*

greater and more complex than institutions allow them to be” (Sennett, 2012: 29). Sennett develops his concept of cooperation, building on his earlier studies on *craftsmanship* in the work place (Sennett, 2008). In those studies he explores the universe of skilled work, where ‘the desire to do a job well for its own sake’ should be more important than just working for the boss or for the money. He emphasises that this does not mean going back in a nostalgic manner to the times before the industrial society. *“Craftsmanship cuts a far wider swath than skilled manual labour; it serves the computer programme, the doctor and the artist”* (Sennett, 2008: 9).

Recently, in a similar way, the Belgian Jonathan Holslag (2014) pleads forcefully for a focus in Europe on *quality, craftsmanship* and *sustainability* in order to deal with the competitive challenges in - what he calls - the Asian Century. People should become critical *producers* but also quality oriented *consumers* who avoid the questionable products of mass production in low wage countries. In that context Holslag emphasises the important role of education. Vocational education in particular should play a prominent role in enhancing quality and craftsmanship by using a combination of working and learning, as is practised in Germany and Austria. In Holslag’s (translated) words: *“vocational education should become the flagship of future European education with the ambition to educate learners to become critical citizens and proud professionals”* (Holslag, 2014: 524).

These sociological concepts and insights are my guides for understanding current developments in education and lifelong learning in the North and the South¹. The key concepts of quality, craftsmanship, cooperation and sustainability are helpful in dealing with the educational exclusion of the young, their problematic transition into the labour market and the challenges of a growing inequality. This will enable us to obtain deeper insights as well as to develop innovative new practices, together with our partners in the field. And that will be the core business of the new chair “Lifelong Learning and Social Intervention”, which I have the privilege of occupying during the coming years.

¹ I am aware that the terms *North* and *South* are geographically inappropriate. Previously we spoke about first, second and third world countries but with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 this is no longer useful. Another description is to talk about developed and developing countries. However, with the growing influence of emerging economies such as China, India and Brazil, the picture becomes ever more dynamic. Notwithstanding these possible objections, I chose to use the terms *North* and *South* to highlight the fact that globalisation has developed very unequally and that, in terms of power relations, the hegemony of the neo-liberal economic approach which originated in Europe and the United States, is still paramount.

In order to explain the value of craftsmanship and of a cooperative perspective for innovative orientations in Lifelong Learning, I will analyse some recent experience, gained together with colleagues and students in the North as well as in the South, of the research network “Youth, Education and Work’ (YEW), formerly called the ESLA project (Early School Leaving in Africa). From this analysis then, I can derive valuable ingredients for an innovative research agenda for the new chair. This agenda contains some theoretical, methodological and intervention-oriented ambitions for the years to come. But first something about the lifelong learning discourse and my own *learn-and-work biography*.

2. The Lifelong Learning discourse: some historical remarks

The policy discourse on lifelong learning is closely related to current political and economic trends as formulated by the sociologists mentioned earlier. In 1996, based on the concept of *éducation permanente*, a broad approach to Lifelong Learning for the Twenty First Century was launched by UNESCO, under the leadership of Jacques Delors entitled: "*Learning: the treasure within*". The commission viewed education in our time primarily as *learning to live together*. All other types of learning should support this most significant goal. Three pillars are essential: *learning to know* (about technology, economy), *learning to act* (as a worker), and *learning to be* (an autonomous, responsible person)². In no time we saw elements of this concept back in the national policy documents, though often reduced to the economic dimension of fitting people to jobs - which may be called a one-dimensional neo-liberal approach.

The policy document of the Dutch government published in 1998, the first one of its kind on *Lifelong Learning*, excelled in this narrow focus, especially compared to the policy documents in the United Kingdom and Finland. The late Max van der Kamp, professor of Andragogy at the University of Groningen, was one of the first critics of this one-sided concept of lifelong learning. In 2000, he stated that the Dutch policy document was mainly focussed on enhancing employability by addressing people in a paternalistic tone, saying they should invest in their own skills and reproaching them if they did not do so (Van der Kamp, 2000). Van der Kamp discovered earlier from empirical research that lifelong learning privileges the higher educated above the low educated, men above women, indigenous Dutch above ethnic minorities, and working above the unemployed (Van der Kamp & Scheeren, 1995). This bias has hardly diminished in the subsequent policies of the Dutch government.

In a later publication, Van der Kamp comes back to the discourse of lifelong learning based on the HYBRID project that investigated some European educational trajectories for semi-qualified groups aimed to prevent social exclusion. He formulated his worries about the role of the Regional Education Centres (ROCs) in the Netherlands concerning the exclusion of semi- educated adults, young early school leavers, migrants and the elderly (Van der Kamp & Toren, 2003). The implementation of Dutch lifelong learning programmes for such groups at risk is still very weak to this day.

² Guest lecture Ruud van der Veen, Module Globalisation and Lifelong Learning, Pedagogy, University of Groningen, May, 2014.

Van der Kamp conducted his research not only in the Netherlands, but also in Mozambique and South Africa. Together with philosopher Lolle Nauta and anthropologist Hans Schoenmakers, of the International Office of the University of Groningen, he initiated collaboration with the University of the North in South Africa, now called the University of Limpopo. In the mid-nineties Van der Kamp and his students supported the establishment of adult education programmes in a region with immense illiteracy, unemployment and poverty. This cooperation finally led to my appointment as the first Professor of Adult Education at that university in 1998. I changed from being a researcher in issues of rehabilitation in Dutch mental health into developing teaching and research programmes in rural South Africa.

Years later, in my farewell address at the University of Limpopo (Zeelen, 2004), I reported similar implementation problems in South Africa as Van der Kamp had noted for the Netherlands, based on extensive research together with my South African colleagues and students in the fields of adult basic education, youth at risk and health education (Rampedi, 2003; Zeelen, 2004; Modiba & Zeelen, 2007; Zeelen, Rampedi & Van der Linden, 2014). Also in South Africa, after promising policy initiatives following the abolition of Apartheid, the neo-liberal approach of Lifelong Learning became more and more dominant. Our research in Limpopo Province showed that many young adults, early school leavers, rural women, young farm workers and prisoners live in isolation with little access to the world of education and employment (Zeelen, 2004). Besides the problem of high dropout, schools are confronted with many other problems: drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, teacher absenteeism, learner abuse, peer pressure and violence. An important obstacle for many learners is as well the use of English as the language of instruction (Zeelen, 2004). The educational system failed to address these problems in anything like an effective way. In line with the findings of Van der Kamp, we can state that Lifelong Learning runs the risk of becoming a slogan from which only the highly-skilled happy few will benefit (Zeelen, 2004: 6).

More than 10 years have passed since then. What did research in the South and the North unveil in more recent years? Does 'bowling together' have a chance? Are cooperation and craftsmanship becoming more visible in educational practices? What are the next steps needed to combat educational exclusion? And what kind of partnerships are vital? I will start with Sub-Saharan Africa, and will use mainly the example of Uganda.

3. Vocational education and lifelong learning in the South: current dynamics

So the first thing, I hated myself ... I stopped in senior [secondary] 4 ... I lacked money for filling in forms, so I never sat for senior 4 exams. So the first thing, I hated myself. I thought of my time that I wasted [in school] and not do other things, because I was seeing other people who had finished primary seven with me ... for them they did their things [didn't continue with education but went into petty trade or farming] and developed. I again looked at the time I wasted in school. Yes, I tried to obtain knowledge but I realised that others were living [had a livelihood]. I did not continue with studies and so I was coming back to look like them [those that never went to school] and become too much of a villager. I really hated myself. I hated my parents and all my relatives; I hated them so much because I was realising that things were there [assets that could be sold to help him complete school] but no relative was willing to help. I felt hurt and I hated myself ... now it is not easy to get jobs ... (Seti) (Tukundane, 2014: 34)

This is from Cuthbert Tukundane's PhD study about the position of early school leavers and the role of vocational education in Uganda, which he defended last year in the aula of the University of Groningen (Tukundane, 2014). The quotation expresses the social exclusion and immense demoralisation of people pushed out of the educational system.

In our research network Early School Leaving in Africa (ESLA)³, which consists of researchers from Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa as well as the Netherlands, we investigate policy options and interventions to combat educational exclusion. In the following part of my talk, I will share with you insights into the implementation of these policies, the influence of the post-conflict situation in northern Uganda, the state-of-the-art of vocational education as well as the striving for higher education.

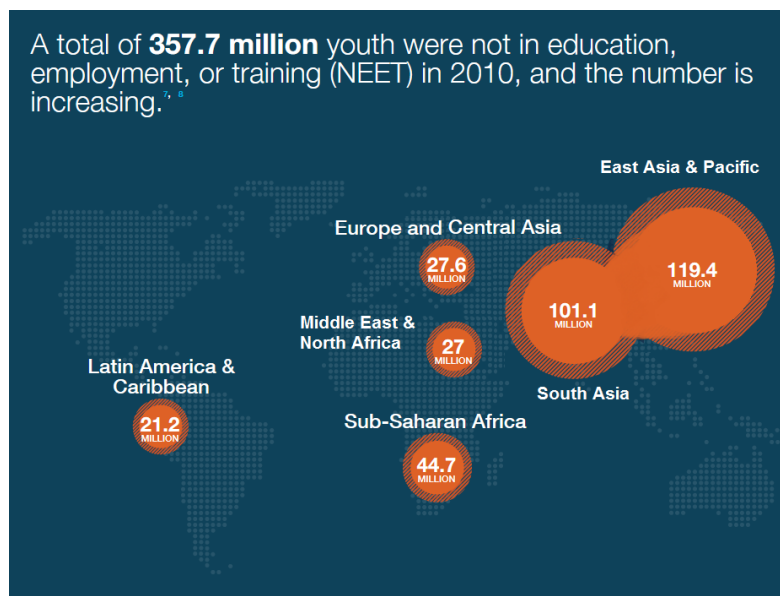
Before we go into these insights, it is important to mention that educational policies in Uganda in the last decade were generally framed by

³ Recently renamed in Youth, Education and Work (YEW). One of the reasons is the inclusion of research projects outside Africa, for instance in San Gil, Colombia.

international policy initiatives such as Education for All (adopted in 1990) and the Millennium Goals 2005-2015. In September 2000 the United Nations adopted eight millennium goals, one of which was to achieve universal basic education (United Nations, 2006).

Implementation

Research findings show that there is reason to be concerned about the implementation of 'education for all' policies. For instance, Uganda, with enrolment rates as high as 97% in primary education has immense drop-out rates. Only 32% of the children enrolled in the first grade finished the last grade of primary education in 2005 (Blaak, Openjuru & Zeelen, 2013; Okello, 2007; Openjuru, 2010; Wedig, 2010). Moreover, Uganda has an alarming 83% youth unemployment rate (World Bank, 2009). Many of Seti's friends are unemployed, hanging around on the streets, or doing petty trade jobs. A substantial group goes for quick money combined with insecure and unsafe jobs as *boda boda*⁴ motorbike taxi drivers. Staying at school is not always an option because those who stay at school often face poor learning conditions as there has been an immense increase in pupil numbers. This often means schools with large classes (often more than 100 learners) and an insufficient number of trained teachers and lack of learning materials (see also Lewin, 2009).



Source: World Economic Forum Global Agenda Councils 'Youth Unemployment Visualization 2013'

⁴ A Boda-boda is a frequently used medium of transport in Uganda with a bicycle or a motorcycle as a taxi. Its driver can also be called a boda-boda. The word itself comes from the English 'border', originally used by cyclists/motorcyclists who helped people cross the border between Kenya and Uganda.

Post-conflict situation

Discussing education in Uganda should include the post-conflict situation in the north of the country. Margaret Angucia's PhD study (2010), with the expressive title *Broken citizenship*, also defended in this hall, has shown the immense challenge of supporting the reintegration of war-affected children and youth into the community after their traumatic experiences in the Lord's Resistance Army. Her study gives a deep insight into the heart-breaking narratives of war-affected children and also shows the importance of including the traditional community rituals for forgiveness and reconciliation in the reintegration. Moreover, follow-up ESLA studies in northern Uganda show how important the role of vocational education, skills training, guidance, counselling and sports is for creating chances for these vulnerable groups (Schnelker, 2013; Van der Bent, 2013; Van der Linden, Blaak & Andrew, 2013; Schönfeld, 2015). Lina Schönfeld points out the importance of active citizenship in this reintegration process, giving rise to active participation within the community instead of merely peaceful coexistence.

Vocational education

Another important problem is the mismatch between the education system and the reality of the huge informal economy (see Minnis, 2006; Blaak et al, 2013). For instance, learners are hardly prepared in terms of the entrepreneurial skills and financial capabilities which they so dearly need for their future survival. The vocational programmes also hardly cater for these skills. More could be done by employers and other stakeholders in the labour market to integrate young starters and protect their rights. More in general, several Ugandan researchers criticise the Ugandan education system for being too academic, very much exam-oriented and with little attention to practical skills (Kibwika, 2006; Kanyandago, 2010; Openjuru, 2010; Tukundane & Blaak, 2010; Tukundane, 2014; Blaak et al 2013). Vocational education has a low status, craftsmanship is not valued, teamwork and cooperative skills – as emphasised by Sennett - are not stimulated and the educational infrastructure is often outdated. The links between educational programmes and the labour market are mostly weak.

Higher education

This posits a deeper problem, namely that across the board (in urban areas and in rural areas), parents, teachers, and learners themselves look at the university as the place to go. This is also a matter of a mind-set. People who leave the academic track are seen as *losers*, at a time when a growing

number of those with degrees are not finding employment easily. Although it is no longer a reality to see the university as a direct passport to joining the elite, the ideology that higher education is a prerequisite for social climbing is still widely supported (see also Lebeau, 2000; Sawyerr, 2002; Zeelen, 2012).

Thus we must conclude that the 'Education for All' policies are mainly focused on *access* and *enrolment* and neglect the issues of *retaining* learners, questioning the *quality of education*, preparing learners for life through *skills development* and *guidance*, as well as dealing constructively with out-of-school youth. International cooperation agencies are tempted "to prescribe narrow basic educational ceilings for poor countries" (Torres, 2003:20; see also Preece, 2009).

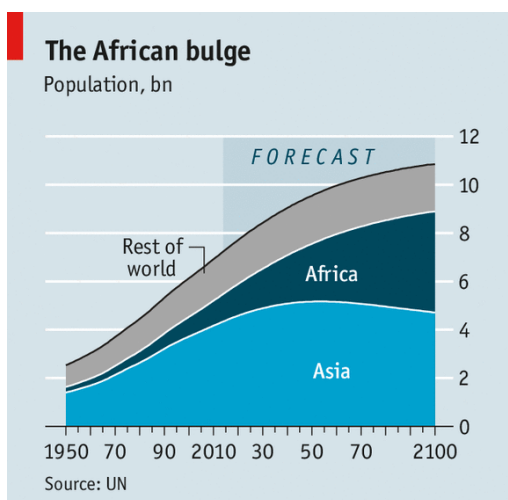
There is a dysfunction of the education system and a growing skills gap between what the youth can offer and what the labour market requires. This leads to an immense *inequality*, especially in countries such as Uganda with a fast population growth, between the learning rich minority and the non-learning (or even un-learning) poor majority, the latter having lost valuable years in a dysfunctional system. Consequently the 'Education for All' objectives and the educational Millennium Development Goals will be attained neither in Uganda nor in several other sub-Saharan countries (UNESCO, 2012).

Way Forward

Finding a way to tackle these issues seems to be not only a matter of putting new policies into place. Public debate and reflection is needed concerning a number of issues, including the attitude of considering vocational education as inferior, the myth of higher education for all, and the strengthening of traditionally strong – but for a long time neglected – economic sectors such as agriculture. Our joint research with Ugandan colleagues (Openjuru, 2010; Angucia & Amone-P'Olak, 2010; Tukundane, Zeelen, Minnaert & Kanyandago, 2013; Tukundane, 2014) has revealed that it is important to work on a renewal of vocational education, making use of new technologies developed in close partnerships with companies and entrepreneurs, and implementing programmes combining working in a company or a small business and learning at school (dual learning). One priority should be the development of *craftsmanship* on the basis of local needs and local talents. For instance, the low quality products from China which are overwhelming the African markets could be pushed back by locally-produced quality products - in line with the plea for quality made by Jonathan Holslag. Crucial is as well to create more opportunities for girls

in vocational education and to get a deeper insight into needs of urban youth. Moreover, job creation should become an urgency, not only by traditional businesses, but also through social firms, cooperatives, innovative projects and forms of creative industries (see for instance Van Beilen, 2012). For example: last November I participated in a conference in Beira, Mozambique. Students of the local university presented their project of an e-learning school which could also serve the population in remote rural areas. In South Africa similar projects have been developed, such as mobile schools in containers with ICT facilities driven by solar power. In this way two birds are killed with one stone. Urgent educational needs of the population are dealt with and, at the same time, work is created by and for the youth.

In this context it is promising that technical and vocational education features more prominently on the recent policy agenda in Uganda (see Scherjon, 2011; Elsdijk, 2013; Tukundane, 2014). However, it is now time for effective implementation of these policies. Especially in the context of the huge growth in population (see figure), there is a pressing urgency to deal with the excluded majority in Uganda. Similar tendencies can be seen in other Sub-Saharan countries, such as Tanzania, Mozambique, Kenya, Malawi and South Africa, as documented in our book: 'The Burden of Educational Exclusion' (Zeelen, Van der Linden, Nampota & Ngabirano, 2010). 'Bowling together' is also very much under pressure in historically collective-orientated cultures. Neo-liberalism fostering *individualisation* and *consumerism* is penetrating the South. Piketty's and Sennett's remarks about the consequences of inequality in the North are extremely relevant in Africa today. The following question is inescapable: How much exclusion can a society afford?



Source: *The Economist*. "Africa's population: Can it survive such speedy growth?" (23 August 2014)

4. Vocational education and lifelong learning in the North: current dynamics

I am at school to get a diploma, aren't I? You're not going to school just to check your Facebook or something like that! I'm going to school for a diploma, not so much to learn anything. I'm really only going to school to get a diploma. That's the only reason I'm going. I could.... Yes, what could I do in future? (Esther, 17 years old, girl, learner vocational education, MBO, The Netherlands)

In the last few years we studied early school leaving and vocational education in the provinces Groningen and Drenthe (De Jong, Docter-Jansen & Zeelen, 2011; Elsdijk, Docter-Jansen, Zeelen & Hoekstra, 2013; Todorovic, 2014). It is important to mention that in the Netherlands half of the learners who complete secondary education continue to vocational education (MBO). Furthermore, we studied the transition of the youth into companies in the port of Rotterdam (Van Belle, 2013), and into companies in Manhattan, New York – the latter research in collaboration with our colleagues from Columbia University (IJdens & Klatter, 2013; Langer, 2013). Let me share with you some important findings and conclusions.

1. Learners in vocational education should learn. Just sitting at school to obtain a diploma – like our teenager Esther – should be avoided. From the beginning, the realities and opportunities of the labour market should be visible in the educational activities. Direct involvement in a practical job is of vital importance for learners who have difficulties sitting in a classroom. Obtaining the basic educational qualification at a later stage on a part-time basis should be facilitated.
2. Although developments in the labour market are not easy to predict, training learners mainly in general competencies (for instance social skills, problem-solving and communication) has its shortcomings if there is no direct link to real work activities. Students should learn a trade in practice and learn from these experiences. As Sennett (2008) formulates: ingrained routines learned over a period of time in concrete workplaces are necessary to develop craftsmanship. Being able to master these routines in different situations helps to deal with future

challenges (see also Langer, 2004). *How* learning takes place is vital and should be connected with *what* is learned.

3. The national and provincial policies and programmes in the Netherlands are beginning to bear fruit in the reduction of early school leaving. Slowly the numbers of early school leavers are going down. However, the out of school youth is not brought into the picture sufficiently, i.e. those who had obtained their basic qualification but did not find a job; those who had a job but lost it or were in danger of losing it due to the enduring economic crisis; and the group of migrants. In other words, the policy agenda of combating early school leaving has to be more closely connected to policies for training and retraining employees and the fight against youth unemployment.
4. In terms of regional collaboration, further strengthening of the links between educational institutions, city and provincial services and care institutions is needed. The relationship between education and the labour market is still weak. There is a great need to establish closer relations with companies and businesses. Teamwork is needed across borders and with deep cooperation. The educational field has the tendency to be inward-looking. There is a focus on incentives to get more students into education without taking into account the labour market relevance of courses and this increases youth unemployment.
5. The integration of new generations within work situations is sometimes problematic. Expectations of newcomers and the views of human resource departments of companies differ. For instance, the younger generation perceives the tuning between work and private life differently from the older generations (Van Belle, 2013). Leadership styles in companies often need adjustment to give the youth a real chance (see Langer, 2004; 2013).
6. The overall frame of thinking about the prominent role of initial education in school institutions as the main preparation for work and active citizenship deserves rethinking (Jarvis, 2007). We need an education system that allows people to be part of

education and training during different periods of the day, as well in different periods of their lives. This will open up opportunities especially for those young people with diverse talents to counteract the exclusion they have experienced in traditional school settings (Van der Kamp & Toren, 2003). For example: Are we not missing a lot of young talent for ICT jobs from the youngsters who are struggling in education or have already dropped out?

That brings us back to the discourse about Lifelong Learning. An important reopening of this discourse in the Netherlands was the publication by an advisory board to the government, the “Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (WRR, 2013); it was entitled: ‘Towards a learning economy’. To deal with the transition from a knowledge economy to a learning economy the board advises concentrating more on *knowledge circulation*. The Dutch government should take more responsibility for educational and economic innovation. In addition, the board made the observation that, overall in the education systems, cognition and skills are becoming too separate – in line with the earlier remarks by Sennett and Holslag about the need for craftsmanship and quality. Moreover, a vital element for our research domain is the board’s plea for the strengthening of the link between working and learning within companies and organisations. After decades of neglect in this area, government and employers should pay more attention to lifelong learning and adult education for a broad variety of groups in society. Indeed, it is more than 15 years since Van der Kamp and many others made similar points (Glastra & Meijers, 2000).

The response of the government to this advisory report was initially half-hearted and defensive. They referred to the strong Dutch economy and the excellent state of the labour force in the Netherlands. They emphasised - again - the responsibility citizens have to invest in their own skills development and bypassed the parts of the advisory report appealing for more government responsibility (see also Notten, 2014). Fortunately, later in the year the report received more attention through an extensive discussion in the Dutch parliament. And more promising still: the government recently produced an initiative to stimulate lifelong learning in education by means of vouchers for part-time students and for employees who would like further education and training. However, the broad approach of lifelong learning as formulated by the report of Jacques Delors - learning to know; learning to act; and learning to be, with the overall aim

of learning to live together - is still something to fight for (see also Touraine, 2000).

An important part of this fight for the implementation of a broad concept of lifelong learning, as formulated by the WRR and the report of Delors, is to counter top-down policy practices. In the past, educational policy strategies of many governments privileged technocratic efficiency above grassroots participation in decision-making. However, purely bottom-up strategies could hardly influence national agendas either. To avoid these hindrances, 'bot-top-down' strategies as suggested by Makgwana Rampedi (2003) in his study on implementation issues in adult education in South Africa, seem to be needed in policy development (see also Zeelen, Rampedi & De Jong, 2011). This means that, while honouring the central role of the government (the top), policies must be founded on solid needs analysis (bottom) so that it is possible to address problems on the ground (down). This emphasises the relevance of participatory approaches, which help by identifying a range of complex economic and educational issues at grassroots level, by empowering professionals and youth to identify problems, and finally, by taking action together. Important partners could be universities, policy makers, practitioners, companies, youth organisations and civil society. These types of (public-private) partnerships could be further developed into learning partnerships to facilitate working on *bot-top-down* strategies and capacity building of practitioners in the educational field (see also Zeelen, 2014). The development of policies grounded in relevant issues, widely supported by appropriate stakeholders and guided by a diversity of socially relevant research, is one step in the right direction towards implementing a broader approach to lifelong learning.

5. Ingredients for a research agenda for the new chair ‘Lifelong Learning and Social Intervention in the context of globalisation’

In the coming period we would like to contribute to the collective challenge of understanding and developing Lifelong Learning practices to overcome social exclusion of young people in a globalised world. Three elements are important: (a) the empirical and theoretical direction of our research; (b) the further development of a participatory research methodology; (c) the contribution to national and international policy transformations.

- a) We need to understand more of the learning processes of young people in the transition area between education and the workplace in different contexts. It is important, in close cooperation with educators and coaches, to develop new types of guidance to enhance meaningful learn-and-work biographies - not only as individual trajectories but also in relation to forms of cooperation between peers, for instance in the context of social firms and start-ups. It is also important to enhance new forms of professionalisation, which are not only technical but also take normative issues into account (Kunneman, 2013). The issue of craftsmanship is not only relevant for young people on their way to the labour market, but also for educators and other professionals, as my former colleague Geert van der Laan showed in connection with social work professionals (Van der Laan, 2006).
- b) ‘Bowling together’ also affects the relationship between researchers and the researched, be it young people, educators, coaches, employers or policy makers. The objects of the research are in fact subjects who think for themselves, are full of experience and consequently are an important source of knowledge. We are not researching people who are just responding to external stimuli or incentives, as my promotor Klaus Holzkamp argued years ago (Holzkamp, 1972). People are not just ‘behaving’ but are – in line with the approaches of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Anthony Giddens, Alain Touraine and Paulo Freire - experienced *actors*. Based on the work of these scholars, the concepts of participatory research, such as action research, are indispensable to enhancing mutual learning, knowledge circulation and collective learning (Boog, Preece, Slagter & Zeelen, 2008; Boog, Slagter & Zeelen, 2008; Angucia, Zeelen & De

Jong, 2010; Blaak & Zeelen, 2013). For instance, in the above-mentioned PhD project by Cuthbert Tukundane, local youth, educators, employers, government officials and community representatives were involved as partners in the research activities right from the beginning (Tukundane, 2014). In our network we need to experiment further with this approach, contributing to its scientific rigour and the quality of its execution. An important element is also to explore further the role of the arts and the theatre to create conversational space to deepen the dialogues and to enhance social change. Fortunately, in bridging the gap between theory and practice, we can also build on the earlier work of scholars of this university, such as the educationalist Leon van Gelder (1964), the psychologist Pieter van Strien (1997) and the 'social interventionist' Ben Boog (Boog et al, 2008).

- c) Partnership between universities, educational institutions, employers and communities are vital in dealing with the complexity, ambiguities and unpredictability of the social world, and more particularly in developing social interventions in the field of youth, education and work (see O'Brien & Ó Fathaigh, 2007). Bowling together seems to be the only way to make progress. First steps have been made to establish regional partnerships to share experiences between the university, educational institutions, youth organisations and companies with the aim of improving the opportunities of the youth in this part of the Netherlands. Moreover, last September our research group facilitated a national debate about the future of vocational education in the Netherlands. In the coming period we hope, with our research activities, to contribute to the empirical quality of the ongoing debate and to the establishment of new policy initiatives.

As indicated, also in the South, policy transformations in the field of education and work are urgently needed. Without substantial policy changes and much greater public awareness, the talent of millions of young people will be wasted and their human rights to education and work will be denied. And what exclusion of large numbers of the younger generation means for the democratic tissue of our societies is painfully visible in several parts of the world. To make a modest contribution to a possible social change, together with our African colleagues, we have the ambition as a

research network to organise a Sub-Saharan conference on Youth, Education and Work in 2016.

Last but not least 'bowling together' means strengthening the collaboration between the South and the North, including the South-South connections (Zeelen & Van der Linden, 2009). Mutual learning, collective knowledge production and a contribution to social change are important elements. In the North we can learn a lot from the experiences in the South, for instance concerning the strength of local African communities and the practices of the cooperative movement in South America. And most of all we can learn a great deal from the resilience and creativity of the youth, as I myself experienced in my personal contacts and friendship with young people surviving with dignity in extremely difficult circumstances.

6. Closing remarks

When discussing the way forward in the field of youth, education and work we cannot avoid saying something about the current globalised capitalist economic system, already under fire by Richard Sennett (2006). Manuel Castells, João Caraça and Gustavo Cardoso (2012) recently made an appealing analysis of the aftermath of the recent financial and economic crisis. They argued that, after a period of unrestricted individualism, economic liberalism and technological optimism, *“any substantial socio-economic restructuring of global capitalism implies the formation of a new economic culture.”* (Castells et al, 2012: 4) In their view, culture and institutions are the foundations of any economic system, which was at first sight - I have to admit - for me as a former Marxist a rather remarkable statement. This new economic culture should stimulate the corporate sector to focus more on sustainability and social responsibility. Moreover, they plead for the development of an alternative economic sector, parallel to the traditional one, based on a different set of values with more involvement from the bottom up. At the same time, they are aware that this transformation and the related political power changes will take a long time to be effected. In their words: *“The old economic cultures that provided certainty, such as the belief in the market and the trust in the banks, lost their communicative power while the new cultures based on translating the meaning of life into economic meaning are still in the process of being created.”* (Castells et al, 2012: 308)

In my view we will have to leave our institutional comfort zones to work on new partnerships to influence national, European and other international agendas. For employers this means taking the concept of sustainable growth into account to a much greater extent than today and investing substantially in the future of young people in their immediate environment. For educational institutions this implies looking beyond student numbers and preparing young people for the realities and opportunities in the labour market and their responsibilities in society. Policy-makers should pay less attention to benchmarks, which seem easy to measure, and more to the real educational and social problems. University researchers in the social sciences should no longer be exclusively intent upon the production of articles for international journals, but should focus on doing research to document, understand and counter inequality and social exclusion in local and international contexts, as also formulated by Thomas Piketty in the conclusion of his monumental book (2014).

As a rejuvenated professor I feel honoured to occupy this new chair at the GSG. I am looking forward to the coming years of working and ‘bowling together’ with my Dutch and international colleagues, students and partners, to accomplish and to enrich the formulated research agenda!

Finally, I would like to thank the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Prof. Dr. Gerry Wakker and the Director of Globalisation Studies Groningen (GSG), Prof. Dr. Joost Herman, for establishing this chair and for giving me the opportunity to fulfill its mandate.

On a more personal note I am indebted to Dr. Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, who was the driving force behind this initiative to establish the chair. Thank you for your perseverance and support, especially in the period that I had to cycle against a head wind.

Without my colleagues in the section Lifelong Learning in the Department of Pedagogy and Educational Sciences, we would not have been able to develop such an interesting research network. My direct colleague Josje van der Linden was and is a beacon of commitment and a trustworthy partner in developing and connecting people’s capacities in the North and the South.

I would also like to thank Ruud van der Veen, former professor at Columbia University in New York. He contributed substantially to the development of our research network.

Paul Wabike initiated the surprise present for this occasion: a new ESLA book with a diversity of contributions from colleagues in our international network. I am very grateful for this wonderful initiative.

I had the privilege working closely together in our lifelong learning section with the gifted youngsters Gideon de Jong, Marit Blaak, Frank Elsdijk, Lenneke Docter-Jansen and Mariëtte Amsing. Thank you all for your energy, intellectual lucidity, and dedication to the excluded in the North and the South. And thanks for keeping me sharp. I am looking forward to continuing our collaboration.

The cooperative work process with and between my former and current PhD students in the North and the South will help to achieve the goals of the research agenda of our network. Many thanks for all your stimulating inputs!

My family, my beloved Julia and our children Jesse and Nina, had the doubtful privilege of dealing with my absence due to my numerous working visits to the South. And in the periods without travel, especially when work seemed tough, my absent-mindedness precluded my new

professorship. I have to thank you, and especially Julia, for your ongoing support and tolerance.

I dedicate this inaugural lecture to two young people from South Africa: Mpho Johannes Sekgololo and Tebogo Mothiba. By their own example they helped me to understand the lives of young people in the rural areas. I admire their perseverance and resilience in creating for themselves and their dear ones a place in the new South Africa.

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In April 2014 Jacques Zeelen was appointed full professor on 'Lifelong Learning and Social Intervention in the context of Globalisation' at Globalisation Studies Groningen, an inter-faculty institute positioned in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Groningen.