# **Abstract TISSA**

**Theorising constructions of employability and processes of social disqualification towards children and parents in poverty situations: An exploration of the work of Robert Castel and Serge Paugam**

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Since the introduction of the Lisbon strategy (2000–2010) and the EU 2020 strategy (2010–2020), European welfare states have developed a particular concern to generate tangible results from the efforts made to combat child poverty (Council of the European Union, 2006; Schiettecat, Roets & Vandenbroeck, 2014). We will argue that this emphasis in anti-poverty strategies coincides with a stringent social investment rhetoric, which is often reflected in national social inclusion policies in European welfare states and based on ideas of active citizenship and employability (Roets et al., 2012; Orianne, 2012; Gray, 2014). As Gray (2014, p. 1751) asserts, while social inclusion centres on ‘championing the rights of poor, marginalised, oppressed and socially excluded groups in society’, it is equally well juxtaposed against neo-liberal stringency, austerity measures to reduce welfare consts, and welfare-to-work programmes. These policies proclaim a focus on human and social capital development, such as marketable skills, knowledge, employability, and self-responsibility, being justified by the promise that these strategies prevent poverty by reinserting those who have been marginalised from education or the labour market into society, or enable them to reintegrate themselves (Dean, 2003; Villadson, 2007; MacDonald & Marston, 2005; Vrancken, 2012). The dependency of citizens on the social welfare system (e.g. in the case of unemployment) has been considered as a vital social risk, and (future) economic participation is put forward as the key marker to recognise people as citizens (Lister, 2003; Jorgensen, 2004). In that sense, children as citizen-workers- of-the-future along with parents in poverty situations who are perceived as being responsible for the well-being of their children have become the central targets and objects of policy intervention (Lister, 2006). As Schiettecat et al. (2014) argue, the paradigm of social investment has found practical expression in preventative interventions, constructing the problem of poverty in terms of education and activation of both children and their parents.

Our contribution is based on the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of a qualitative research project in Belgium, in which the network dynamics of four local and inter-organizational networks of welfare actors are explored that are formed to combat child poverty (see INCh, 2014). We will argue that those recent social policy reforms and developments reflect the emblematic ‘triumph of a more individualist understanding of social relations that weakens the idea of collective responsibility’ (Marston & McDonald, 2014, p. 1023), and demonstrate an ideological shift to conditionalization (Vrancken, 2002). This conditionality of welfare rights implies that citizens have no rights without responsibilities, and that welfare rights - often rather subtly - shift into social obligations (Dwyer, 2004; Dean, 2015; Lorenz, 2016). In our paper presentation, we will mainly rely on the work of Robert Castel and Serge Paugam to explore theoretical notions of employability towards both parents and children in these local realities, and to theorize processes of social disqualification that make us able to understand poverty as a result of combined inequalities.