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Governmentality of disability in the context of lifelong learning in European Union policy

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ABSTRACT

The possibility to participate in education and lifelong learning has been introduced in EU disability policy in recent decades as one of the key means to improve the socioeconomic position of disabled persons. Simultaneously, lifelong learning has been developed as the defining concept of EU education policy to increase social cohesion and economic competitiveness. However, the education, employment rate and socioeconomic status of disabled persons have remained far below the EU average. In this article, we theorize governmentality to explore (1) how EU lifelong learning and disability policy discourses constitute and govern disabled persons and (2) how disabled persons are positioned in the policy discourses. The data consist of the most relevant EU policy documents concerning lifelong learning and disability policy in the twenty-first century. We argue that the policies constitute and govern disabled persons as a group who do not fulfil the premises set for the lifelong learner, and that consequently, policy discourses marginalize disabled persons instead.

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Introduction

Within recent decades, disability policy alignments in the European Union (EU) have systematically aimed at improving the societal position of disabled persons¹ by stressing the importance of employability and, as part of this, the possibilities to participate in education and lifelong learning (LLL) (European Commission [EC], 2000b, 2003, 2010a). Simultaneously, LLL has become the defining concept of EU education policy guidelines since the Lisbon Goal in 2000 (EC, 2000a, 2001, 2006, 2010a; European Parliament, 2000), and it has been introduced as a central policy tool in the transformation to a *knowledge society* (Volles, 2016), fostering *economic competitiveness* and *social cohesion* (e.g. EC, 2000a, 2001, 2006, 2010a). Despite the two policies' objectives, the average education, employment rate and socioeconomic position of disabled persons have remained far below those of the nondisabled population in the EU²: less than 10% of disabled persons' (aged 15–64) participate in education (nondisabled persons 20%), the employment rate is

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47% (nondisabled persons 67%) and being at risk of poverty or social exclusion comprises approximately 30% of disabled persons (nondisabled, 22%) (Eurostat, 2017).

Although the concept of LLL and its political alignments have been criticized for their exclusive dimensions regarding minority groups—including disabled persons (e.g. Brine, 2006; Popkewitz, 2008)—the concept is taken for granted as regards improving the societal position of disabled persons in disability policy. Hence, rarely has much attention been given to the concept of LLL and its policy implications in relation to disability policy and to the intersections of the policies, that is, how these policies support and are in line with each other.

In this article, we utilize the theorization of governmentality (Foucault, 1991) as an analytical approach to explore the relations of power and government in disability and LLL policies in the EU context where the policy objectives have not been reached. In this theoretical context, we approach the concept of LLL as a discourse and political tool for reorganizing and legitimating education, its objectives and the norm of a lifelong learner (cf. Schuetze, 2006). The theorization about disability is, in turn, drawn from the field of critical disability studies. This field emphasizes that the focus of scrutiny should expand from materialistically oriented studies on disability to include discursive practices and constructions of the norm, i.e. the idealization of able persons, to understand the societal positioning of disabled persons (cf. Campbell, 2009; Davis, 2013; Goodley, 2014; Mitchell & Snyder, 2015; Tremain, 2015).

Applying these theoretical perspectives, we focus on the relations of power and government with respect to the intersections, interfaces and contradictions within the EU's LLL and disability policies. We point out how these policies and some of their implications are problematic in terms of improving the societal position of disabled persons. Within this context, our research questions are as follows: (1) *How do the EU's lifelong learning and disability policy discourses constitute and govern disabled persons* and (2) *how are disabled persons positioned in the policy discourses?*

Governmentality within policy discourses of disability and lifelong learning

When approaching LLL and disability policies from the perspective of Michel Foucault's (1991) theorization about governmentality, the question concerns the relationship between the individual and the social, that is the legitimate ways of governing and constructing subjects' freedom in liberal societies (see Simons & Masschelein, 2015). Therefore, governmentality means the exercise of power in networks of different *rationalities* and *technologies*, which are shaped, for instance by institutions, procedures and tactics (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016; Rose, 1999). In these networks, we learn to govern the conduct of others and of ourselves: the *conduct of conduct* (Foucault, 1991).

Political rationalities refers to the ways of reasoning, reshaping and responding to particular societal situations and the problems produced within a policy discourse (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016; Dean, 2010). In this study, we particularly concentrate on *social liberal* and *neoliberal* rationalities. In *social liberal rationality*, it is the role of political authorities, professionals and the state, not markets, to oversee the societal order, including economic productivity, citizens' wellbeing as well as their opportunities to participate in societal activity in the sense of the welfare state (see Rose, 1999; Simons & Masschelein, 2015). The subjects' freedom is governed *through society* (cf. Rose,

1999). By *neoliberal rationality* we refer to a cultural project of social and economic transformation under a deregulated free market (Peters, 2008). Under this reasoning, education, health and welfare policies are restructured according to the market (Rose, 1999), and the domain of freedom is construed and governed in terms of the entrepreneur-self operating in a free market (Rose, 1996; Simons & Masschelein, 2015). By focusing on these two rationalities, our interest is in how the change from social liberal ‘governing through society’ to neoliberal ‘self-governing’ is shaping and reshaping disability and LLL policies (see also Brine, 2006; Goodley, 2014; Liasidou & Symeou, 2018; Mitchell & Snyder, 2015; Volles, 2016).

Political rationalities are embodied in various practices and *technologies* (Dean, 2010; Rose, 1999). From the perspective of governmentality, the EU’s LLL and disability policies are specific technologies that are produced to shape and regulate the conduct of individuals and groups through different interventions in their everyday lives (see Bansel, 2015). Within this analytical framework, LLL is approached as a model of governing subjects, including their desired abilities, in relation to their community (Olssen, 2008). LLL and its techniques create such distinctions as ‘normal-abnormal’, and ranks the qualities, skills and aptitudes of individuals (Edwards, 2002). It aims to resolve problems of the individual and community by strongly focusing on the skills and abilities of subjects. Therefore, LLL and lifelong learners are understood as norms toward which disability and disabled persons are directed.

Employing the theorizations of critical disability studies, we approach the concept of disability as a politically, historically, culturally, socially, economically, materially and discursively created and produced multidimensional phenomenon and governmental apparatus (see Tremain, 2015). The governing concentrates on a subject’s abilities and body functions by defining some of these as disabilities and impairments in relation to the norm (Campbell, 2009; Goodley, 2014). Utilizing this approach, we expand the focus from disability to the relation between the construction of the norm, i.e. LLL, and disability within and in the intersections of the policies.

We approach disability and LLL *policies as discourses*. According to Stephen Ball (2015, p. 6) policy discourses are ‘produced and formed by taken-for-granted and implicit knowledges and assumptions about the world and ourselves’. The special nature of policy discourse is that it ‘represents attempts to construct and legitimate ways of seeing, evaluating and describing reality, and therefore constitutes a movement or site for the effectuation and instrumentation of specific social, political and economic aims’ (Wilkins, 2016, p. 36). From this perspective, the policy discourses of LLL and disability are not seen as totalizing, but as multiple and contradictory, intersecting with other discourses (Bacchi, 2000). Therefore, both policies have their own trajectories and aims that shape the governing in the policies (cf. Bansel, 2015).

To understand governing in the policy discourses of disability and LLL in the EU, we see governmentality as being connected to the following three factors: *knowledge, power and truth*. This means that policies always exist in relation to the understandings of a vision of moral order in different societies and in different political rationalities, i.e. regimes of truth that resemble ‘truth games’ (Foucault, 1980; Taylor, Rizvi, Lindgard, & Henry, 2006). This perspective directs attention toward the ways in which subjects and the concepts of disability and LLL are constructed in discursive practices. It looks at how they are produced as objects of knowledge through various techniques in LLL and

disability policies legitimated by the power of the EU Commission (Wilkins, 2016). This is why *political problems* are not considered in terms of ideology or science, but rather power and truth, thus there exists a constant ‘battle around truth’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 132). Hence, we use governmentality as an analytical lens through which to explore how *the norm of LLL* governs, defines and intersects with the concept of disability in EU policies.

Contextualizing the governmentality of lifelong learning and disability within EU policies

The political LLL policy project emerged in the 1970s by raising questions concerning equality and democracy. LLL was legitimated by the social sciences within the contexts of civil society and welfare state regimes based on social liberal reasoning (Kinnari & Silvennoinen, 2015; Borg & Mayo, 2005). The LLL agenda was mainly driven by humanistic principles of emancipation and participation to prevent the alienation of citizens during an era of rapid postwar development. LLL ideology made it possible to address the risks and challenges of a changing society. Emancipation, empowerment and individual development were ‘technologies’ for reaching the desired citizenship for constructing the desired society (Kinnari & Silvennoinen, 2015).

In the 1990s, LLL transformed into an overarching educational reform involving issues of employment and market regulation in the EU (Volles, 2016). The current LLL discourse is mainly driven by a neoliberal agenda, by promoting economic globalization, and where LLL has become a central political tool for fostering economic competitiveness and social cohesion (e.g. EC, 2000a, 2001, 2006, 2010a). Referring to the Lisbon Goal (European Parliament, 2000), a competitive and knowledge-based economy requires better jobs and greater social cohesion. LLL has been represented as an inclusive idea, but it contains contradictions. In the EU’s policy rhetoric, people are said to be Europe’s main asset (e.g. EC, 2000a, 2001, 2006, 2010a). Referring to people beings as ‘assets’ shows that LLL is replete with neoliberal human capital theory. Within this neoliberal LLL policy context, the governing is mainly directed at the subjects themselves, by underlining their responsibilities and obligations to modify their competencies and learning according to the market (Rubenson, 2006).

Disability policy has been chiefly based on social liberal reasoning in recent decades (cf. Mitchell & Snyder, 2015; Oliver, 1996). Until the 1960s and 1970s, the policy characterized disabled persons as a group that was a threat to society and, therefore, the group was institutionalized and excluded from societal activity (Mitchell & Snyder, 2015; Oliver, 1996; Tremain, 2015). During that era, the concept of disability was defined individualistically and the governing of disabled persons was legitimized primarily in terms of medicine such as eugenics (see Mitchell & Snyder, 2015; Oliver, 1996). In the 1960s and 1970s, this policy and the way of governing was challenged by disabled people’s activism which demanded their full civil rights by emphasizing that it is the society itself that disables persons with impairment(s) (Oliver, 1996). Therefore, policy should be directed to societal arrangements, not merely individuals. From the perspective of governmentality, the medical-based justification of the exclusion of disabled persons was problematized and the concept of disability, in turn, became defined in relation to society (Simons & Masschelein, 2015). Since this paradigmatic shift in defining disability, many international and EU disability

and education policies since the 1980s have dealt with societal aspects of disability (European Union [EU], 1997, 2000; UN, 1981, 1993; UNESCO, 1994). However, the governing was still mainly organized through society in the sense of social liberalism, but now emphasizing society's responsibility to improve disabled persons' opportunities to participate in societal activity, e.g. by removing social barriers (cf. Morris, 2011).

In the 1990s and 2000s, the UN's and EU's established conventions and declarations aimed to improve the inclusion of disabled persons (EU, 1997, 2000; UN 2006). Nonetheless, while the improvement of opportunities has been a central aim of education and disability policies from the 1990s onward (EC, 2000b, 2003), inclusion policy has encountered challenges from neoliberal reasoning. Attempts to combine these policy objectives have reshaped the interpretation of societal inclusion by emphasizing both diversity and the entrepreneurial self (Niemi & Mietola, 2017; Goodley, 2014; Liasidou & Symeou, 2018; Mitchell & Snyder, 2015; Simons & Masschelein, 2015). The neoliberal (re) definition of inclusion has been argued to have reshaped the objectives of disability policy to be more individualistic (see Morris, 2011) as well as to have reoriented the techniques of government and governing toward individuals themselves, and their abilities and disabilities in terms of the market (e.g. Mitchell & Snyder, 2015; Simons & Masschelein, 2015).

Data sources

Our data sources consist EU disability, education and LLL policy documents from the twenty-first century. By mapping out the main global conventions and policy documents framing EU disability and LLL policies in recent decades, we narrowed the data to seven EU Commission policy documents for detailed analysis. In these documents, the European Commission introduced and implemented official disability and LLL policy guidelines for 2000–2020 (e.g. Borg & Mayo, 2005; Halvorson, Hvinde, Bickenbach, Ferri, & Guillén Rodriguez, 2017; Schuetze, 2006; Volles, 2016). The seven documents were analyzed in pairs (three document pairs) to identify the overlaps of both policies. The logic of pairing was based on the changes that took place in the policies during the time-frame and how the policies interconnected, reacted and reshaped objectives in relation to previous policy alignments. The analyzed documents were published in 2000–2010. The time-frame of the documents was grounded in the paradigmatic changes that took place in both policies in 2000. The documents published in 2010, in turn, introduced and implemented the policy alignments for today.

The policy documents *Towards a Barrier-Free Europe for People with Disabilities* (EC, 2000b) and *A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (EC, 2000a) form the first analyzed document pair. *Towards a Barrier-Free Europe for People with Disabilities* (EC, 2000b) was the EU's first official disability policy document in which alignments were based on the Amsterdam Treaty (EU, 1997), and which followed the guidelines of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (EU, 2000). Both the treaty and the charter emphasized that all people in the EU have human rights and equal rights to participate in societal activity. In the 2000s, the Lisbon Strategy, in turn, introduced LLL as the key EU strategy for becoming the world's most competitive area (European Parliament, 2000). *A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (EC, 2000a) intertwined with the Lisbon strategy and introduced the detailed objectives of LLL policy.

The documents in the second pair are *Making a European area of Lifelong Learning a reality* (EC, 2001) and *Equal opportunities for people with disabilities: A European Action Plan* (2004–2010) (EC, 2003). *Making a European area of Lifelong Learning a reality* (EC, 2001), published in 2001, was a response to A Memorandum on Lifelong learning (EC, 2000a) which was criticized for introducing an overly economic view of LLL. This LLL policy document introduces a softer, less economically oriented view of LLL. The disability policy document *Equal opportunities for people with disabilities: A European Action Plan* (2004–2010) (EC, 2003), instead introduced actual guidelines for improving the societal situation of disabled persons and established the disability policy guidelines for the rest of the decade.

Key competences for lifelong learning (EC, 2006), *Education and training 2010 work programme* (EC, 2010a) and *European Disability Strategy 2010–2020: A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe* (EC, 2010b) forms the third pair. In 2006, the EU introduced key competences for lifelong learning (EC, 2006) which all citizens should manage in order to survive in the rapidly changing world. In the education and training programme (EC, 2010a), these competences were incorporated into strategy, introducing policy guidelines for the upcoming decade. In the European Disability Strategy 2010–2020 (EC, 2010b), the disability policy guidelines were redefined and introduced for the ongoing decade. The guidelines' redefinition rested upon the UN's convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (CRDP), approved in 2006 (UN, 2006) and emphasizing full rights for disabled persons to participate society and in Europe's economy.

The process of analyzing governmentality in policy discourses

Our detailed analysis is discursive; it highlights the nuances in the ways of using language, and brings out how the policies may or may not work (Taylor et al., 2006, p. 43). The analysis includes three phases from the perspective of governmentality. In the first phase, inspired by the 'What's the Problem Represented to be' (WPR) approach, developed by Carol Bacchi (e.g. Bacchi, 2000; Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016), we organized and highlighted the discursive manner used in the policy documents. The purpose was to determine what policy *problems* were represented within disability and LLL policy documents and to scrutinize how 'governing takes place through problematizations' (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016; p. 17; see also Bacchi, 2000; Foucault, 1991). This phase concentrated on the question of how policy problems are represented and constituted in relation to the concept of disability (see Davis, 2013), how the concept of LLL is presented and justified as a main education policy agenda, and how both concepts are applied in governing.

In the second phase, the target was to track down *how* the main objectives of the policy documents were exemplified in relation to the problems presented, and what governing techniques were introduced to reach the policy objectives (see Foucault, 2008; Wilkins, 2016). The analysis was both contextualized in political rationalities and narrowed to the language used in particular documents, the latter meaning how certain objectives and solutions are produced as part of a particular policy discourse (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). In the last phase, we concentrated on relations between constructions of LLL and disability, and how these constructions intersect, overlap and

govern each other within the policy discourses (see Goodley, 2014). This was done by examining intersections and expressions of disability and disability-related concepts in the LLL documents as well as LLL and LLL-related concepts in the disability documents.

Governing subjects and disability through differing rationalities

In the first document pair published in 2000, the political rationalities differ from each other and, therefore, the subjects of the policies are governed and constituted distinctively and contradictorily. The *Memorandum of Lifelong Learning* (EC, 2000a) presents two reasons for promoting LLL in the EU. Firstly, it introduces human beings to be the main asset of a knowledge-based society and economy. Therefore, LLL is named as a key concept to improve competitiveness, employability and adaptability. Secondly, Europeans are presented as living in a complex society where education functions as a key to learning and to understanding the challenges that this involves. The memorandum's social and economic objectives mean that LLL would have an important purpose: to promote both *active citizenship* and *employability*. Within the LLL discourse, people themselves should become the leading factors in knowledge societies. Contrarily, the *Towards a Barrier-Free Europe for People with Disabilities* (EC, 2000b) policy programme emphasizes the equal rights of disabled persons to participate in societal action and improve this group's societal situation through modifying the environment.

The LLL document states that equal access to learning would be achieved only by bringing learning to the learners themselves. Learning is produced as a social process and, therefore, learning systems must adapt to the changing ways in which people live and learn. Within this discourse, individuals' (dis)abilities become represented as a policy problem in relation to the idealization of lifelong learner, such as 'how to adjust learning environments to enable integration of the disabled' (EC, 2000a, pp. 13–14). Hence, the policy defines information and communications technology (ICT) as offering 'great potential for reaching scattered and isolated populations in cost-effective ways' (EC, 2000a, p. 19). In this sense, disabled persons are characterized as insufficient citizens who need tailored learning opportunities, especially ICT. Therefore, LLL appear to individualize disability. ICT, in turn, governs through the responsibilities and possibilities involved in modifying the bodies of individuals toward the idealization of the lifelong learner (see Campbell, 2009; pp. 40–42; also Goodley, 2014). Hence, in the context of LLL, disabled persons are constituted as potentially, but not yet becoming, proper (active) citizens, and are, consequently, governed by emphasizing their potentiality and incompleteness.

In the following excerpt from the LLL document, the governmentality of disability is materialized by setting ableist and exclusive prerequisites for lifelong learners in European knowledge societies:

People themselves are the leading actors of knowledge societies. It is the human capacity to create and use knowledge effectively and intelligently, on a continually changing basis, that counts most. To develop this capacity to the full, people need *to want and to be able to take their lives into their own hands* – to become, in short, active citizens. (EC, 2000a, p. 7, emphasis original, italics added)

We argue that the objectives and expectations for the lifelong learner presented above are based on an idealization that the lifelong learner, i.e. an able subject, is equal to an independent subject. This discourse governs independence in relation to the knowledge society, employability and active citizenship in terms of the economy. Consequently, disabled persons are constituted and governed as a group that needs assistance and tools to possibly 'take life into their own hands'. This ableist discourse positions disabled persons either on the margins or outside the norm of the lifelong learner (Kauppila & Lappalainen, 2015).

LLL policy grounds its objectives on economic matters: competitiveness, employability and adaptability. Within this policy discourse, the lifelong learner is replete with the ideas of human capital theory where the subject is a reflection of *homo economicus* (Foucault, 2008). It is idealized within the neoliberal regime of truth by emphasizing self-actualization in terms of economic competitiveness and success in the context of the knowledge society (cf. Borg & Mayo, 2005; Peters, 2008). In this 'truth game', the content of learning is defined in relation to competitiveness and economic growth, and disabled persons, in turn, are constituted as not fully employable and productive subjects, and the governing is directed to them by offering tools, such as ICT, to improve opportunities for self-activation and self-directed learning.

The *Towards a Barrier-Free Europe for People with Disabilities* (EC, 2000b) policy programme frames the main obstacle to participation to be societal barriers by emphasizing that 'people with disabilities are recognized to be one of the most disadvantaged sections of our society and continue to face considerable barriers in accessing all aspects of social life' (EC, 2000b, p. 3). However, the concept of LLL is not explicitly mentioned in the document, but the promise of it appears there when the act of removing barriers in various domains of life is presented as an ideal of disability policy. In the document, the 'drive toward a barrier-free society' means that 'greater synergy between related issues' in different societal areas, such as employment, education, transport and the internal market, should be emphasized (EC, 2000b, p. 7).

Disability policy represents the participation of disabled persons mechanistically, where removing barriers is introduced as the main means of societal participation. The policy emphasizes societal responsibility to respond to the needs of disabled persons, especially on issues concerning employment. Within this policy discourse, disabled persons are chiefly constituted as *physically restricted*. However, this narrows both the definition of disabling practices (see Shakespeare, 2006) and the group of disabled persons for whom participating in societal action is possible in terms of employment (see EC, 2000b, pp. 5–6). In this policy discourse, disabled persons are governed through the society. It is the responsibility of society to remove barriers and enable participation. In this sense, governing mainly draws on social liberal rationality (cf. Rose, 1999).

When comparing disability and LLL policy discourses in the first document pair, it is evident that both policies have exclusive dimensions, but, most importantly, the aspect of employability and employment in both documents is primarily restricted to resolving the issues of physical and social barriers to societal inclusion. However, the policy discourses are based on different rationalities, and therefore the policies represent distinct problems and introduce different techniques for reaching the objectives. In disability policy, disabled persons are governed through society, when in LLL policy the governing is directed to individuals themselves through self-government. Therefore, the

ways of dealing with the policy problems in these two policies vary and may conflict with each other when the governing is based on distinct political rationalities.

The convergence and expansion of governing: from structures to individuals

In the second document pair, the way of reasoning the justification and objectives of the policies converge. LLL policy emphasizes its inclusive dimensions (social cohesion) by defining disabled persons as ‘potential learners’. Potentiality is represented as the possibility of reaching the standards of lifelong learner, at least partially, with modern technology. Within disability policy, in turn, LLL forms one of the key means to combat segregation and to improve the societal situation of disabled persons. Thus, governing in policies converges from structures to individuals in disability policy as well.

The objective in *Making lifelong learning a reality* (EC, 2001) is to clarify that LLL is a broader concept not limited to a purely economic perspective, as was presented in *A Memorandum of lifelong learning* (EC, 2000a). The updated 2001 report a year later highlights the centrality of the learner, active citizenship, personal fulfillment, social inclusion, employment-related aspects and equal opportunities in learning. This ‘softer’ definition expands the governmentality of LLL to wider aspects of life than strictly economic issues (Kinnari & Silvennoinen, 2015; see also Simons & Masschelein, 2015). It specifically addresses the equal opportunities point of views, and states that such opportunities would be targeted toward specific groups to ensure the availability of LLL for all and to strengthen social cohesion.

In the document *Making lifelong learning a reality*, the specific groups defined to be at risk of social exclusion, such as ‘people on low income, disabled people, ethnic minorities and immigrants, early school leavers, lone parents, unemployed people’, are referred to as ‘potential learners’ (EC, 2001, p. 13). Within this policy discourse ‘potential learners’ are represented as a policy problem, and social exclusion becomes individualized in relation to abilities, i.e. potentialities. Through this problematization, the policy discourse makes it clear that in order to remove social, geographical, psychological and other barriers to learning and societal inclusion, various tailored measures are required to assist ‘potential learners’. These measures, i.e. ICT and diverse new ways of ‘flexible learning’—bringing learning and learners together—are particularly highlighted in the document (EC, 2001, p. 23, 27). ‘Potential learners’ is a category employed to facilitate the actualization of the individual; that is disabled persons are seen as having the potential to increase their human capital. This governing toward an unreachable objective (the standards of LLL) is an example of what Lauren Berlant (2011) calls *cruel optimism*. It means that (political) objectives are set in a way that are either impossible to reach or that their attainment would lead to an unsatisfactory situation (see Berlant, 2011; also Goodley, 2014). Despite LLL’s exclusive dimensions, the advantages of social cohesion and tackling social exclusion are defined as having ‘a key role to play in developing a coordinated strategy for employment and particularly for promoting a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce’ (EC, 2001, 6).

Similarly, even though the focus of the European action plan *Equal opportunities for people with disabilities* (EC, 2003) is on barriers, it also shifts toward emphasizing free choice and equal opportunities to participate in societal action. The action plan defines that the most effective way to attain the full inclusion of people with disabilities is that special

attention be given to mainstreaming disability issues ‘in employment-related policies, especially in education and lifelong learning’ (EC, 2003, p. 13). LLL becomes the main governing principle to ‘support and increase employability, adaptability, personal development and active citizenship’ (EC, 2003, p. 3). However, the action plan also includes the objective of introducing nontraditional labor market opportunities:

Support the *free choice* of better training and learning offers by more specialised lifelong guidance and counselling and career guidance services for opening up non-traditional labour market opportunities and all non-work related learning opportunities for people with disabilities. (EC, 2003, p. 19, italics added)

In this sense, two contradictory policy objectives are defined in the document. The first emphasizes employability and equal opportunities to participate in the European labor market. The second underlines individualized, nontraditional labor market opportunities, which commonly means special employment arrangements in sheltered workshops without employee status (see European Parliament, 2015). These contradicting objectives are legitimized by emphasizing *free choice* which, in turn, shifts the governing from social factors, such as physical barriers, to the subjects themselves, their freedoms, choices and ambitions for self-actualization and self-fulfilment (see Edwards, 2002; Rose, 1999).

The way of presenting opportunities through free choice in disability policy has been converging with LLL policy, and hence, individuals’ abilities become the objects of governing in disability policy, too. The rhetorical justifications familiar to social liberal rationality are changing into ideas and a vocabulary related to neoliberal rationality (free choice, responsibility, tailored needs, employability). Governing of the self toward ‘the norm of employability’ is realized, as in LLL policy, by offering supportive tools, and by emphasizing that the use of modern ICT can be ‘one way to overcome barriers’ (EC, 2003, p. 19). This alters society’s role from ‘the state knows best’ to a ‘help people to help themselves’ approach (Morris, 2011, p. 10), where societal participation is defined in terms of equal opportunities but the governing is directed to the disabled persons themselves to increase their own activity as in LLL policy. Through the convergence of these policies, it seems that the idealization of the lifelong learner has also passed into disability policy, forming a defining norm in that context as well.

Governing disability through competences and inclusiveness

The third analyzed document pair continue with policy alignments similar to the previous one, emphasizing societal inclusion and economic competitiveness as the main policy objectives. However, the way of problematizing the societal situation and reaching the objectives changes in both policies. LLL policy defines key competences as a central means to improve social cohesion and employability in the EU, and demonstrates its inclusiveness through taking into account ‘disadvantaged groups’ (EC, 2006, 2010a). Disability policy, in turn, focuses on empowering disabled persons and building an inclusive economy and society in a cost-effective way (EC, 2010a). Through these changes in policies, the governing still functions through self-governing techniques, which now are justified in terms of neoliberal inclusiveness.

In the *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* (EC, 2006) document published 2006, the EU defines eight key competences for LLL:

- (1) Communication in the mother tongue
- (2) Communication in foreign languages
- (3) Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
- (4) Digital competence
- (5) Learning to learn
- (6) Social and civic competences
- (7) Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- (8) Cultural awareness and expression

The *Education and Training 2010 work programme* (EC, 2010a), for its part, grounds its policy guidelines for the next decade upon the key competencies. Both LLL policy documents justify the need for key competencies through problematizing the societal situation, i.e. the challenges of globalization. The policy presents key competencies as a response to these challenges, and defines them as necessary for personal fulfilment, active citizenship and social cohesion enabling further learning and employability in a knowledge society (EC, 2006, 2010a). The policy discourse concerning key competences idealizes such abilities as necessary for each citizen in order to survive and ‘adapt flexibly to a rapidly changing and highly interconnected world’ (EC, 2006, p. 394/13). Through the defining of the key competences, the governmentality of LLL standardizes the required abilities for European citizenship which reflects the idealization of a neoliberal white collar worker (Kinnari & Silvennoinen, 2015; see also Brine, 2006).

However, LLL policy emphasizes its inclusiveness in relation to key competencies by taking into account persons defined as having ‘educational disadvantages’ caused by personal, social and economic circumstances, including ‘older people, migrants and people with disabilities’ (EC, 2006, p. 394/11). Within this discourse, the disparity between the competences of persons defined as having educational disadvantages, on one hand, and the ideal of a competent lifelong learner, on the other, become a policy problem. Moreover, this disparity also functions as justification for LLL policy and governing techniques by stating that key competencies have a dual function: to develop capacities for innovation, and to integrate persons from disadvantaged groups into the knowledge society (EC, 2006, 2010a). Within this context, the policy discourse characterizes persons with educational disadvantages as an ‘at risk’ group.

More efforts are needed to support the acquisition of key competences for those at risk of educational under-achievement and social exclusion. Existing efforts aimed at providing additional funding for disadvantaged learners, support for special education needs in inclusive settings or targeted measures for preventing early school leaving should be further mainstreamed. (EC, 2010a, p. 117/6)

The framing of ‘risk’ functions as justification for governing (see Dean, 2010; Rose, 1999), which is legitimized in terms of inclusiveness (see Mitchell & Snyder, 2015; Simons & Masschelein, 2015). Persons categorized and labeled as ‘at risk’ are defined in policy documents as being in danger of dropping out from the moral order of the neoliberal inclusive economy.

Inclusiveness as a governing technique is a double bind process, which functions through individualization and totalization as Simons and Masschelein (2015) argue; it reaches all individuals (including persons with educational disadvantages), but totalizes how persons should participate in society (the key competencies). Thus, the governmentality of LLL now captures the subjectivity of disabled persons. The governing legitimizes itself in LLL policy by emphasizing how disadvantaged groups should be treated equally and how they should have equal access rights and receive particular support to fulfil their educational potential (see EC, 2006, p. 394/11). Governing through potentiality (enabling disabled persons through ICT) is familiar from the earlier LLL policy discourse (EC, 2001), but now it is legitimized in terms of inclusiveness and equity. Hence, disabled persons are directed to pursue the same standardized competencies and skills for participating in an inclusive economy.

The *European Disability Strategy 2010–2020* (EC, 2010a) frames the political problem as the unsatisfactory social and economic situation of disabled persons. However, the way of problematizing the societal situation and setting the objectives for disability policy parallel the LLL policy. The strategy outlines that for the ongoing decade, the overall aim of disability policy is ‘to empower people with disabilities so that they can enjoy their full rights and benefit fully from participating in society and in the European economy, notably through the Single market’ (EC, 2010a, p. 4). As in the LLL policy, the governing functions through the rhetoric of inclusiveness and inclusion.

Full economic and social participation of people with disabilities is essential if the EU’s Europe 2020 strategy is to succeed in creating smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Building a society that includes everyone also brings market opportunities and fosters innovation. (EC, 2010a, p. 4.)

In disability policy, the inclusiveness totalizes participation in terms of market opportunities and innovation (see Liasidou & Symeou, 2018). It individualizes and governs the participation by emphasizing cost-effectiveness; ‘the strategy aims to improve the lives of individuals, as well as bringing wider benefits for society and the economy without undue burden on industry and administrations’ (EC, 2010a, p. 4).

The policy discourse of inclusiveness constitutes and governs disabled persons as a group, who have rights and responsibilities to participate in society, but within market limits (Mitchell & Snyder, 2015). Within this discursive context, disability policy defines LLL together with inclusive education as a solution to empower disabled persons, enabling them to become members of a learning society (EC, 2010a, p. 8). From the perspective of governmentality, the idealization of LLL becomes internalized as a defining norm in disability policy for improving disabled persons’ societal situation in a learning society in a cost-effective way. In this sense, the moral order of neoliberal inclusiveness welcomes the participation of all individuals, but within the strictures of a neoliberal regime of truth. This is done, in part, by emphasizing the needs of ‘disadvantaged groups’, and legitimated by terms such as equity, freedom and autonomy.

Conclusion

This article focused on how the EU’s LLL and disability policy discourses constitute and govern disabled persons and how discourses position disabled person from the perspective of

governmentality. The policies were approached as technologies for governing the subjects, shaped by prevailing rationalities. Our analysis shows that the EU's LLL policy governs and marginalizes disabled persons and positions the disabled outside of the norm of lifelong learning. This contradiction is crucial, being at the intersection of policies in which disabled persons are constituted as a group who do not fulfil the premises set for the lifelong learner as *homo economicus*. Instead, both policies emphasize inclusiveness and equity by defining disabled persons as an 'at risk' and 'disadvantaged' group. Through these definitions, the policies legitimate different supportive, that is, governing, techniques, such as ICT. Supportive techniques focus on formulating cost-effective means, and through them, disabled persons are directed to fit into the labor market and be productive (Hodkinson & Burch, 2017; also Mitchell & Snyder, 2015). The governing directs disabled persons as neoliberal individuals, and it is their responsibility to modify their potential and own bodies, if possible, toward the ideal of the lifelong learner. Thus, it can be argued that the policies include a premise emphasizing that impairment and disability are harmful to the social and economic order and that they should be mitigated (see Campbell, 2009; p. 39; Davis, 2013).

Comparing our analysis to the explicit LLL policy objectives *social cohesion* and *competitiveness*, we argue that whether it is possible to attain both objectives through LLL policies is questionable. The premises of LLL policy derive from assumptions that are exclusive to disabled persons characterized within the policy discourse as 'disadvantaged'. If we consider all the documents as a whole, it appears that the prerequisites and necessities of the economy and labor market form the prevailing neoliberal rationality for a knowledge society. Consequently, economy-based governing passes into education and disability policy by defining, constructing and restricting the aims and subject in both policies (see Goodley, 2014). Therefore, it is questionable whether disability policy can ever reach its objectives of inclusion, as conceived within the policy discourses, in a 'cost-effective way'. It is also uncertain to what extent it is possible for disabled persons to gain the abilities to manage the key competences which were defined for lifelong learners. Our argument thus approximates Jacky Brine's (2006), in that the neoliberal formation of a knowledge society is a dual entity having two incompatible objectives: social cohesion and economic competitiveness. Therefore, those who are defined as 'at risk' and 'disadvantaged' exist on the border between inclusion and exclusion (Brine, 2006, p. 661).

When considering LLL policies as one of the EU's major educational themes, they also emerge as a 'truth game' for all educational policies. It governs the conception of the learner, but also other dimensions such as desired abilities, attitudes and skills, i.e. virtues of the labor market citizen. The LLL policies produce learner-subjects, who are responsible of their own learning, are able to learn how to learn, and who understand the importance of learning. At the same time, LLL is a tool for organizing society and the economy; this makes LLL political and connects it to political rationalities. The current objectives of LLL are based on social cohesion and competitiveness, which are presented as being achieved by increasing human capital and qualifications, but also the motivation and desire for education. It is no surprise then, why the ideas, conventions, practices and policies from neoliberal rationality are breaking into the rhetoric of disability policy as well. Thus, it remains unclear to what extent it is possible to establish a conception of lifelong learner which does not exclude disabled persons in a neoliberal regime of truth.

Notes

1. Instead of ‘persons with disabilities’, we use the term ‘disabled persons’ to highlight the societal, cultural and discursive disabling practices and aspects of the phenomenon known as disability (cf. Campbell, 2009; Goodley, 2014).
2. Eurostat (2017) defines disability as ‘having a difficulty in basic activities’, and the latest statistics concerning education and employment are from 2011. The statistics ‘at risk of poverty and social exclusion’ are from 2013, and in these the age cohort is 16 years or more.

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