(from 260 to 90 days) for those persons that had not previously paid insurance contributions. This measure particularly touched young people after obligatory schooling that must wait 6 months before gaining access to benefits. These measures, as can be seen abundantly in the parliamentary discussions (see particularly the parliamentary discussions NR 2009: 575), were driven by a concern for the provision of incentives to make employment more attractive than unemployment insurance, respectively to increase the pressure to take up an apprenticeship.

2.5. From the Emergence of a Problem Towards the Construction of a Policy

This description of the development of transitions policies in Switzerland serves as an example of how “youth”- as a category of public becomes a central politically contested issue within debates on Social Policy. Zinnecker proposes to analyze the construction of youth as a contested “field of struggle” (Zinnecker 2003), in which experts, government agencies, and diverse societal actors participate. Based on the conception of youth as a life-course phase, he proposes to analyze the political regulation of the “institutionalized” moratorium of the youth phase. He proposes the following leading questions to sensibilise for processes of political regulation of the youth phase: “Who is legitimate to formulate the goals of the youth program? Who administers and controls the cohorts of youth and its subgroups? Who is profiting from the youth moratorium and who gets the mining rights for the human capital generated during the youth Moratorium? Who pays the considerable costs that a youth moratorium generates?” (Zinnecker 2003: 57, own translation). The discussions about the installation of a “right to vocational training”, the parliamentary discussions on the question of how much state intervention is needed and appropriate in the field of vocational training, the adaptations of different policy field to the principle “vocational training before unemployment insurance” (Nahtstelle 2010), but also the concrete policy developments regulating the access to different institutionalized pathways can be interpreted as struggles on the institutionalization of the youth phase. As has been described in the previous chapter, not only leg-

21 It is highly probable that the reduction of duration and amount of unemployment benefits was influenced by a public discourse which problematized the existence of SeMo’s (see Zysset 2008 for a thorough discussion). Motivational Semesters where denounced for their stigmatizing effect and for send the wrong signals to young school leavers who find themselves “too early in the role of unemployed” (see for instance the parliamentary motion 07.3790 from 10.12.2007 by national counsellor Otto Ineichen). The provision of unemployment benefits would constitute a dis-incitement for young people to search for an apprenticeship place, and SeMo’s would - in certain cases - not act in concordance with the principle “education before employment” (Nahtstelle 2010).
islative actors and the different state departments but also actors of the economy, NGO’s in the field of youth, educational departments and labor-market economists played a central role in these struggles. The discussion on the reforms of the VET system is characterized by controversies between the educational system and the economic system where the latter successfully influenced the educational system to be fashioned according to the needs of the economy. The discussions on the reform of the VET act leave no doubt on the fact that the question of transitions from school to work is – at the end of the day – inextricably linked to the regulation of the future workforce of the Swiss economy. While the Swiss vocational training system always oscillated between the promotion of education and the promotion of the economy, it seems to have undergone some more dramatic changes within the second phase of development of transition policies. This has an impact on the conception the youth phase. As described in the first chapter, the youth phase as a life-course phase came into being during the 19th century, with the socio-structural breakthrough of industrial capitalism. The demand for a skilled labor force leads to the increased exemption from work and to the de-location of the social “space” of youth from the factory to the school. This socio-economic moratorium based on state-supported age-graded markers is increasingly reviewed along principles of public action following the principles of “social investment”. The (limited, if existent) state intervention pointed towards youth – in its early days – was aiming at securing at least to a minimum the subsistence of those not being needed by the economy. Transition measures like the Motivational Semester, paired with the implementation of benefit entitlements for school leavers – were a public policy arrangement for youth that acted as a substitute to the market. Within the social investment paradigm, the finalities of state intervention have changed: Policy measures like the SeMo are not simply legal vessels aiming at an artificial prolongation of the preparatory phase to employment, but they are made relevant in terms of a substantial investment in the human capital of young persons. In contrast to the idea of a prolonged educational moratorium and more general education, educational governance seems to have taken a form of increased regulation of youth as the future workforce.

2.5.1. Contradictions of the Swiss Transition Regime

This incremental change of the Swiss transition regime is also exemplified through at first sight quite contradictory finalities. On the one side, a “right to vocational education” (the LIPA-initiative – see the previous chapter) that would have resulted in a elongation of the obligatory school age and generated costs for the provision of secondary vocational training has clearly been dismissed on the grounds not to “socialize” the VET-system, to prevent a potential mismatch between the skills of the workforce and the labor force needs of the economy, and a fierce opposi-
tion by the economy that was fearing the loss of sovereignty over conferring VET-certifications. On the other hand, the loose agreement between the different actors on the Nahtstelle led to the installation of a federal benchmark according to which the number of secondary education diplomas should be augmented from 88% to 95%. On the other side, the principle of “education before unemployment” (Nahtstelle 2010) found large recognition. The (lack) of educational credentials is increasingly seen as a financial risk for the state, as it increases the risk of unemployment and of benefit dependency. As the Egger, Dreher and Partner report criticized, “no institution has neither an incentive, nor a responsibility to ensure a “continuous follow-up” of that 3% of school leavers with a severe risk to stay out of the apprenticeship-system” (Egger Dreher and Partner 2007: 7, own translation). While, actors from social insurance increasingly highlighted that the “duty to train, above the obligatory school age should be requested – young persons should feel a pressure from all involved actors to do an initial vocational training” (CSIAS/SKOS 2007: 2, own translation) no demand-side measures (e.g. qualifying elements in so-called transition measures) have been implemented. In addition, the 4th reform of the unemployment insurance introduced cost containment measures that particularly reinforced the conditionality principles for young persons and reduced benefit duration and waiting period considerably.

These contradictions show that the reforms did not primarily aim at facilitating the access to VET, but to re-arrange of transition systems according to robust incentive structures that enhance the propensity of young persons to look for an apprenticeship. It seems as if transition policies changed from a “retention basin”, a “waiting room” (Heinimann 2006) for those that could not find an apprenticeship towards a policy that directly aims at the enhancement of individual availability for the labor market. During the reform process, the problem of potentially wrong incentives of transition systems that lead young persons to prefer other “suboptimal” solutions like for instance transition measures or “doing nothing” (Egger et.al 2007: 58) to an apprenticeship played a central role. The 2010 educational report described that offering too many transition measures could result in giving incentives for youngsters to stay at home (Educational report 2010: 156). Within this model, the individual (young person) is seen as a homo oeconomicus, who – if given the wrong incentives – rationally chooses to stay out of an apprenticeship. The problem, so it goes, is neither a lack of apprenticeship places, nor the virtues or vices of the young person that behave perfectly rational in choosing welfare over work, but the “incentive structures” that have to be re-designed towards faster labor-market entry. In this logic, the “model of rational-economic actions serves as a principle for justifying and limiting governmental action” (Lemke 2001: 197). Or in the rationale of the reforms of the transition system: Do not provide too many transition measures, young persons will choose welfare over training. This is – as Lemke shows – characteristic for a form of neoliberal governmentality in which governmental
practices are assessed by means of market concepts: “It allows these practices to be assessed, to show whether they are excessive or entail abuse, and to filter them in terms of the interplay of supply and demand” (Lemke 2001: 198). The regulation of the workforce through this new economic arrangement can be described as form of neo-liberal governmentality in which a “re-definition of the social sphere as a form of the economic domain” (Lemke: 2001: 198) takes place. The youth moratorium and its “inhabitants” are increasingly evaluated from an economic viewpoint that highlights its costs and its later utility. The call for the prevention of a “insidious augmentation of the entry age into apprenticeship” (Nahtstelle 20010: 27) and the concern for an “optimization” of transitions that prevents biographical detours and ensures a fast economic self-sufficiency bear witness of this process. These changes can be appropriately described within a larger process in which the relation between the capitalist economy and the state changes. In classical political economy, the specific qualitative aspects of “human capital” are not seen as a factor to be influenced by the state. State intervention was limited to securing – in an extensive way, the living conditions of those people that dropped out of the economic process. In the change from a “Keynesian Welfare State” towards a “Schumpeterian Workfare State”, government policies are – due to a flexible global economy – less able and willing to take influence through national economic policies. They rather focus on the enhancement of “structural competitiveness of open economies mainly through supply-side intervention and to subordinate social policy to the demands of labor market flexibility” (Jessop 1993: 19). As Jessop describes, “activation policy also extends into education and training and not just unemployment insurance and social security” (Jessop 2005: 165). In this era, the skills and capacities of the labor force as a central vector on which the government can have an influence. State policies thus – to put it bluntly – increasingly opt for “a policy of growth which will no longer be simply indexed to the problem of the material investment of physical capital, on the one hand, and of the number of workers, [on the other], but a policy of growth-focused precisely on one of the things that the West can modify most easily, and that is the form of investment in human capital” (Foucault 2008: 232). The changing language in which the problem of “transitions” is addressed in political discourse seems to bear witness of this process. Rather than intervening in the market mode of coordination of the vocational training system (see the previous chapter), the government decided to focus on “incentive structures” (the carrot), on “pressure” (the stick) and on individualized counseling of a limited risk-group.

2.5.2. Discursive Shifts: From Youth Unemployment to “Youth at Risk”

The transformation of transition policies was accompanied by an important discursive shift – while youth unemployment was largely seen as outcome of struc-
tural problems of the Swiss economy during the 1990s, the implementation of the VET-act paralleled with more individualized problem descriptions. Research had identified that transition problems were restricted to a small group of 3-5% of a cohort and that these could be clearly identified by specific risk factors. These groups would dispose of “multidimensional deficits” (Egger, Dreher and Partner 2007; CMBB 2010) and would, therefore, require more specific support, a support that the new VET-law foresaw. In addition, the situation on the apprenticeship-market allegedly got better, and the fact that a certain number of apprenticeship places where left free led to a discussion in which policies were more and more thinking about ways to reduce disincentives for young people to enter apprenticeships. The lack of apprenticeship places is redefined as a lack of educational competencies by young persons and as such redefined as an educational problem.

While the structural scarcity of apprenticeship places was a central narrative of the discourse in the 1998s, the reframing of youth unemployment takes, since the stronger involvement of the OPET and the higher availability and recourse to scientific knowledge22 a shape that focusses on the behavior and the characteristics of the population in question. This discourse has some strong similarities with the discourse on “NEET’s” (not in education, employment, and training) in the UK (Scott/Payne 2006) and on the European level (Mascherini 2019) that is increasingly used to frame the problem of youth unemployment. While in official documents and research reports (a research report from the TREE-consortium making a rare exception) no direct reference to the term NEET’s can be found, the similarities in terms of basic presuppositions are multifarious: Firstly, just like in the UK, the

22 A early OECD report on the transition from school to work in Switzerland (Galley/Meyer 1998) stated that Switzerland had a huge knowledge gap on transitions which constitute a kind of “black box” (ibid. 54) due to the lack of coherent administrative, but also scientific, longitudinal Data. This situation changed with the publishing of the results of the first PISA-assessment (2000), the start of the transition panel “TREE” (2000), the national research program “education and employment” (NFP43-2000). The introduction of “barometer of apprenticeship places” (2006) regularly monitoring the situation on the apprenticeship market, and finally the different reports commissioned within the Nahtstellen-project. Bear witness of the huge increase in knowledge production on young people. This was also strongly driven by politico-administrative concerns of governing unemployed youth. The development of the TREE Study is a prime example of this development: While research based on three data yielded invaluable knowledge on the transition processes of young persons and inequalities of the Swiss VET system, it also constituted a prime source of knowledge for the effects of policies on the transition pathways of young person and was largely exploited for government-commissioned reports (Egger Dreher and Partner 2007, 2008, Educational report 2010) aiming at providing government knowledge and at making young persons “knowable”. It comes as no surprise that the discourse of young people as “risk subjects”, the identification of particular “risk groups” and a particular emphasis on the specific individual deficits is born in this period.
emergence of the term NEET’s corresponded to a change in administrative categories, in which benefit entitlements were reduced to youngsters under the age of 25 (Yates/Payne 2006: 331). Youth unemployment and the status of an unemployed worker below 25 years was replaced with the term NEET’s. While we cannot observe the same change in Switzerland, the changing focus from “unemployed youth” towards “youth with difficulties” (VET-act) or “youth at risk” corresponds to a redefinition of the aim of transition measures. Young persons should not be treated as “unemployed” (because of the potential stigmatizing effects, but also because unemployment benefits would present a negative incentive to stay out of apprenticeships) but should predominantly be oriented towards measures in the education system: “Education before unemployment” (Nahtstelle 2010). The emergence of the “youth at risk” – discourse is an outcome of a contradictory element of the implementation of the Swiss transition regime: on the one side, no real institutional responsibility for the transition period was established: Legally “it is no explicit task of the state to ensure that young persons at the end of obligatory schooling are provided with a transitory solution, neither do young persons have the duty to look for one” (Egger, Dreher and Partner 2007: 20, own translation). The fact that the legislator has abstained from introducing a higher age of obligatory schooling (which would have come with a responsibility to provide a sufficient number of training places) set a limit to state involvement in the post obligatory schooling period. On the other side, young people in transition, especially those that would potentially not be able to do a fluent and instant transition to the apprenticeship system constituted a relevant target group of state intervention. The policy case-management vocational training (CMBB 2010), introduced in the wake of the “Nahtstelle” reforms constituted a compromise between these two contradictory aims of state intervention. Here, important claims of the Egger et. al report have been taken up. The problem that young persons with a low motivation could simply “hide” from the institutional radar, and that no institution had an incentive, neither a responsibility to ensure a “continuous follow- up” (Egger Dreher and Partner 2006: 21) of those 3% of school leavers with a severe risk to stay out of the apprenticeship system was resolved through a “identification and monitoring of the risk group” (OPET 2007) and the implementation of a “systematic monitoring of the risk groups from obligatory schooling on” (CMBB 2010). Faced with restricted capacities to prescribe top-down policies to the cantons, the BBT (the federal office for vocational training) implemented the CMBB-project through non-directive agenda setting, normative pressures and bench-marking and the provision of (financial) incentives for cantons. As Kraus (2010) argues, this mode of governance reminds in many characteristics to the open method of coordination in the European Union policy architecture. The OFFT/BBT did therefore not provide a “readymade model” but stated minimal criteria to which cantonal offices had to comply if they wanted to be eligible for funding. Cantons where given financial incentives to develop a cantonal case-
management concept that had to tackle specific issues. These cantonal concepts had to develop a systematic inventory of existing measures, designate the actors that participate, and describe the processes through which young persons would be accompanied (BBT/SBBK 2008). It is indicative that 4 of the 8 points were referring to the identification, diagnosis and monitoring and tracking of the “risk-group” that the cantonal case-management offices had to take account of. In an analysis of the cantonal concepts that had to be submitted to the BBT in order to receive funding, Kraus (2010: 297) identifies three main argumentation lines for the introduction of the CMBB. A “legalist” argumentation, referring to the articles 3, 7 and 12 in the newly established VET-law, a “collectivist” argumentation, referring to the costs that persons without an apprenticeship generate for the state (ibid. 300), and an individualist argumentation that highlights the right (to VET) and the obligation of the young person to cooperate in one’s own integration trajectory. In short, the argumentation rather refers to the prevention of potential human-capital losses linked to the “drop-out” of youngsters of a specific risk-group rather than adequate socio-political framing of the youth moratorium. This amounts to a productivist re-interpretation of the youth-moratorium under activation-pedagogical signs (Dahmen and Ley 2016). Different to the access to particular “welfare rights” that are bound to the citizenship status of young persons aiming a securing subsistence through transfer-payments (Chevalier 2017), we are witnessing a “productivist reordering of social policy” (Lister 2003: 430) where the prevention of future costs is key concern. Furthermore, the high emphasis put on young person's individual deficits, omnipresent in the parliamentary discussions on the reform of the VET Law, resonates within discourses of self-responsibility and parallels the specific focus of activation reforms on younger people (see chapter 2.3.2). This impression finds confirmation when looking at the intended implementation of the case-management vocational training schemes. In a recommendatory document by the swiss conference of cantonal offices for VET as well as their federal counterpart, the BBT, “Case-management professional training” is described as aiming at “help to self-help (empowerment)” (BBT 2007: 1, own translation) for disadvantaged youth. It recommends to conditionalize welfare benefits on the consent to participate in educational measures (ibid.: 11) and suggests the use of “contractual agreements” between the case manager and the young person in order to “responsibilize” the young person (ibid.: 3). As such, CMBB endorses the activation discourse to a certain extent. It focuses on supply-side interventions through working on a young person's behavioral dispositions and job choices. This illustrates a discursive shift from "lack of employment" to a "lack of employability" (Garsten/Jacobsson 2004) that is visible in the recent development of swiss transition policies. This implies the institutionalization of new expectations towards the subject. The subject itself, insofar it potentially causes a potential cost to the collective through refusing to get an apprenticeship has to adapt to different circumstances (for instance to a specific
pattern of labor-force demand). This “shift in the rights and duties of the welfare state and citizens” (Valkenburg 2007: 29) can be interpreted as a re-arrangement of the status of citizenship from “status to contract” (Handler 2003) – benefits are not subject to eligibility by citizenship-status but are made conditional on the citizen to behave responsibly.