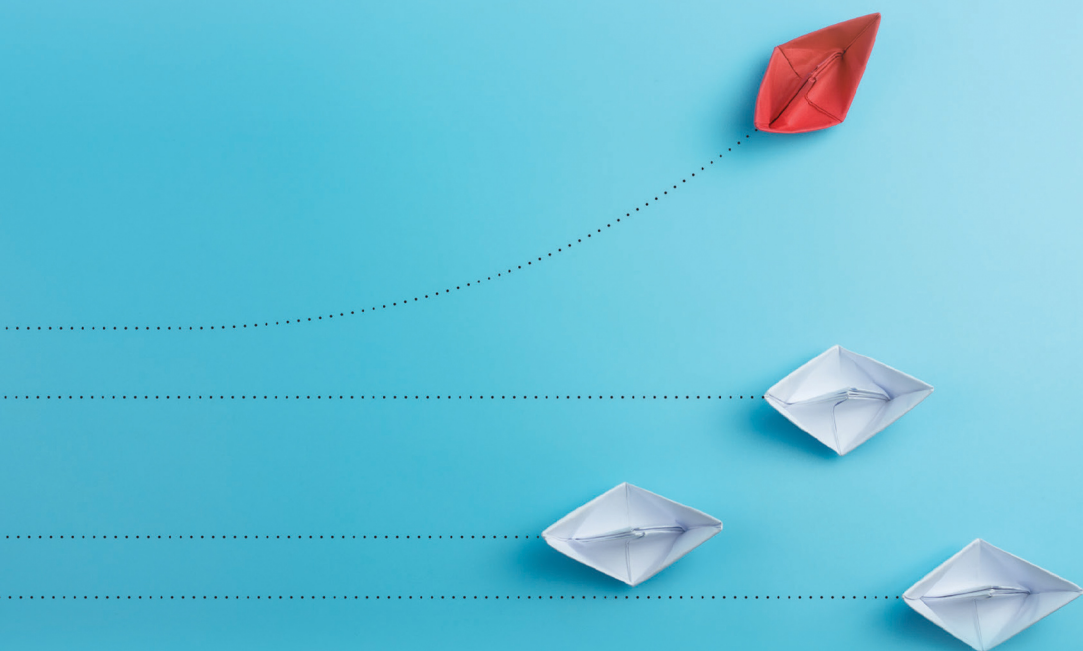# Lifelong Learning Policies for Young Adults in Europe

Navigating between Knowledge and Economy

Edited by

Marcelo Parreira do Amaral,
Siyka Kovacheva, Xavier Rambla

LIFELONG LEARNING POLICIES FOR YOUNG ADULTS IN EUROPE

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Preface

A crucial challenge of contemporary European societies lies in developing lifelong learning (LLL) policies that support these populations to live enriching experiences, broaden their knowledge and acquire up-to-date skills. This book deals with LLL policies for young adults, in particular those in vulnerable situations and near social exclusion. It elaborates on the findings of a European research project – Policies Supporting Young People in their Life Course: A Comparative Perspective of Lifelong Learning and Inclusion in Education and Work in Europe (YOUNG_ADULLLT) – that investigated the potential of LLL policies in nine member states of the European Union (EU). YOUNG_ADULLLT enquired into the specific forms of embedding of these policies in the regional economy, the labour market, the education/training systems and the individual life projects of young adults. The research was carried out in Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Scotland between 2016 and 2019.

The editors and authors gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme (Grant Agreement No 693167). Through this programme, the European Commission aims at implementing the flagship initiatives 'Innovation Union' and 'Europe 2020' that seek to secure the global competitiveness of Europe by driving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and jobs. Reflecting the policy priorities of the Europe 2020 strategy to address major societal challenges, a call for proposals in 2014 'YOUNG-3-2015: Lifelong Learning for Young Adults: Better Policies for Growth and Inclusion in Europe'[1] was pitched to address the challenge of 'overcoming the economic and social crisis and meeting the Europe 2020 targets on employment, poverty reduction, education, sustainability, innovation'.

In responding to the call, the YOUNG_ADULLLT research consortium did not assume that economic and social objectives are harmonious and co-extensive, but argued instead that although these objectives may be complementary, they are not linearly or causally related, and due to distinct orientations, differing objectives and temporal horizons, serious conflicts and ambiguities may arise from policies eliding both aims. The project's aims took these observations into consideration and set out to scrutinise the various LLL policies for young adults and analyse their potentially competing (and possibly ambivalent) orientations and objectives. One main objective has

been to gain insights into their implications as well as intended and unintended effects on young adult life courses. YOUNG_ADULLLT aimed at critically analysing current developments of LLL policies in Europe with a view to preventing ill-fitting policies from further exacerbating existing imbalances and disparities as well as identifying sustainable practices and patterns of coordinated policy-making at regional and local levels across the EU.

The editors and authors also gratefully acknowledge the work of the 15 partners of the consortium – and invite readers to visit the project website for more information on the research project and partners: http://www.young-adulllt.eu/. We particularly thank the dedicated colleagues who contributed the chapters that make up this book and are very grateful for the many occasions for discussion and debate, mutual learning and inspiring collaboration. We also would like to say thanks to Jozef Zelinka and Maurice Adiek for their diligent work on the manuscript of this book.

Special thanks go to a group of experts who have accompanied the research project by joining the National and European Advisory Boards. Without mentioning the plentiful names, we are thankful for their comments and feedback at all stages of the research, which have genuinely improved the whole of our endeavour. Their feedback on our activities and reports has been indispensable for achieving the goals of the project and this edited volume.

We also wish to express our gratitude to the experts in charge of lifelong policies in the abovementioned nine countries who kindly contributed to our study by taking part in interviews detailing their perspectives and insights into their work and the challenges they face. Some of them have also made very helpful recommendations for the fieldwork, analysis and dissemination of this study. The consortium is particularly grateful to those who joined a number of policy roundtables that the project convened in two regions of each country as well as in Brussels.

Special appreciation goes to the numerous young people we encountered in this project, through research and observation, who shared with us their learning biographies, their concerns and hopes in in-depth interviews. Well beyond simply providing data and information about their experience with LLL policies, they have shared with us invaluable insights into the dynamics of their life courses, including their relationships and their feelings and thoughts about how they perceive societal expectations, and what needs and potentials they identify for their individual life plans. They showed us that they also have much to say and made an array of suggestions. We

invite all those involved or related to LLL policies to listen to their voices and take on their perspectives.

Note

[1] Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014–2020), Societal Challenge 6 – 'Europe in a Changing World: Inclusive, Innovative and Reflective Societies'. The Call YOUNG-3-2015 is available from: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/europe-changing-world-inclusive-innovative-and-reflective-societies

Between knowledge and economy: lifelong learning policies for young adults in Europe

*Xavier Rambla, Siyka Kovacheva
and Marcelo Parreira do Amaral*

Despite significant improvements in social conditions and successive waves of wide-ranging technological innovations in the recent past, many young people still do not enjoy circumstances favourable to elaborating and pursuing their own life plans and choosing the course of their future. Furthermore, although the majority of member states in the European Union (EU) attempt to maintain relatively generous welfare states, in most of them too many youths find themselves in vulnerable situations and do not succeed in, or are excluded from, education and training. Against this background, policy makers have focused on lifelong learning (LLL) as a means of supporting young people to overcome situations of near exclusion, in particular through their integration in the labour market.

The concept of LLL stems from long and rich debates that emphasise different connections from early childhood to adult learning and stress the universal right to education.

In the EU context, LLL policies have a long history (EC, 2000, 2001) but only more recently have they focused on aspects beyond vocational (and recurrent) training for employment of adults, now extending to consider economic, political and social aspects for younger generations as well, including aspects of general and higher education but also support for groups exposed to factors of 'social vulnerability' (Riddell et al, 2012; Rasmussen, 2014). At the same time, the political focus on LLL has moved to labour market security and economic competitiveness and a stronger orientation towards human capital and employability.

LLL policies today bring together active labour market strategies, vocational education and training (VET) policies, adult education initiatives, and social welfare and support measures for disadvantaged groups that aim at creating economic growth and, at the same time,

guaranteeing social inclusion for young adults in vulnerable situations. While these economic and social inclusion goals are complementary, they are, however, not coextensive. Due to differing orientations, objectives and timelines, conflicts and ambiguities may arise and young people find themselves navigating between the pursuit of subjective meaning in constructing their own life courses and the search for marketable competencies and skills sought after in the economy.

In this book, we explore how LLL policies devised to support young adults affect the groups most exposed to situations of vulnerability. Education, labour market and social/youth policies are the focus and particular attention is devoted to how they are embedded in local and regional contexts that largely determine their ability to be effective. A central argument is that it is by looking into the specific regional and local contexts that policies are best understood and assessed.

In line with the attention to diverse contextual settings, this edited volume also examines how current European LLL policies construct the target groups of young adults and whether they account for the fact that young adults are a highly dynamic and heterogeneous target group in terms of socioeconomic stratification and living conditions, but also in terms of life projects, interests and possibilities. In this regard, the book looks into relevant social developments affecting young adults such as life course de-standardisation processes and the emergence of a new political economy of skills. These differing living conditions pose different challenges for young adults who have to cope with societal needs and expectations. Thus, not only do these expectations vary according to context, but so do the perception and understanding of young adults as a group.

In short, the themes addressed in the chapters relate to several fields of the social sciences, not least comparative education and youth studies, but the collection also aims at yielding social impact in that the book explores the possibility of designing coordinated policy-making at different geographical levels. At the same time as the EU exerts influence through recommendations addressed to member states, policy makers and civil societies are starting other multifarious and choral conversations on the living conditions and the biographical experience of young adults.

LLL between knowledge and the economy: tensions and synergies

The metaphor of LLL as navigating between knowledge and economy appears suitable for different reasons. It seems relevant since young

adults actively engage in searching for learning and knowledge as well as for social and economic recognition, while also looking for guidance to find their way. Mostly however, the metaphor makes sense because the whole set of beneficiaries, professionals and institutions, but also living conditions and social structures as well as educational and labour market challenges and opportunities may be seen as the troubled sea in which young people turn to LLL to open up possibilities for them to create subjective meaning in constructing their life projects and life courses.

It is tempting to say that young adults simply need a compass with which to find their routes. However, the plurality of meanings, orientations and goals of LLL policies generate both tensions and synergies, particularly where policies encounter the real-life conditions of young adults, that is, in regions that display varying sets of functional relationships with European and national contexts and produce specific forms of embedding of these policies in the regional economy, labour market and education/training systems.

Further, the stakeholders of LLL do quite different things depending on their own view of the concept. Since some of them understand that education does not only take place in schools during childhood, they endeavour to read all educational practices that adults carry out through the lens of education theory and the right to education. For others, however, adults cannot devote their time to education if they are unable to make a living. Thus, many stakeholders think about LLL in terms of jobs, the labour market and the employability of individuals. This predicament is not only a philosophical debate but also a concrete consequence of the missions that international organisations, governments and civil societies nowadays pursue.

Since the 1970s, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has stood for a wider view of LLL that encompasses all facets of knowledge. In this vein, people must not only learn knowledge, but they also need to complete certain tasks, and more importantly, become a certain type of person (Faure et al, 1972; Delors et al, 1996). Therefore, people can learn at different times and in diverse contexts throughout their whole life. Knowledge cannot be reduced to the experience of the young, who are obliged to attend schools for learning. It must be accessible and affordable for young adults, middle-aged and elderly people (Ouane, 2011).

More recently in 2014, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning has reaffirmed its conception of LLL in order to plan a mid-term strategy for the period between 2014 and 2020 (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2014). The resulting definition portrays LLL

as a continuous and multifaceted process that fosters professional and personal development in all aspects of life. This process intermingles with the most noticeable problems of equity insofar as many children do not have access to appropriate school education. Equity is also disrupted when school leavers eventually underexploit their academic skills in routine jobs. Additionally, UNESCO claims that values-led LLL is essential for such common goods as active and democratic citizenship and even peace building.

Despite acknowledging this approach, since the late 2000s the EU has adopted an understanding of LLL that prioritises employment (Papadopoulos, 2002). In fact, the European Commission (EC) established in 2006 a list of 'key competences for lifelong learning' that schools and institutions working in VET, adult education and higher education were expected to develop and implement. When it reviewed the progress of that initiative, ten years later the EC argued that these competencies provided very useful instruments to harness globalisation. Besides looking at the situation in each country, the review argued that those competencies were particularly necessary to face an array of challenging social transformations such as digital innovation, increasing intercultural contact and climate change. Thus, besides general academic skills, the recent approach emphasises the high relevance of entrepreneurship and digital skills (EC, 2018: 3).

This book analyses a large corpus of empirical evidence collected in 18 regions selected from nine member states of the EU. This evidence reports on the living conditions of young adults, the professional concerns of decision-makers and street-level professionals that deliver LLL through education, labour market and social welfare policies, as well as the personal aspirations of more than 150 young adults who are exposed to diverse factors of vulnerability. For all these people – policy makers, experts, professionals and young adults dealing with these issues – the dilemmas mentioned not only inspire philosophical debate and trigger political contention, but centrally highlight the evident, routine problems of their everyday lives and the questions as to the future of their immediate regional contexts and their own biographies.

Sources of empirical evidence

The chapters in this volume present findings from the European research project Policies Supporting Young People in their Life Course: A Comparative Perspective of Lifelong Learning and Inclusion in Education and Work in Europe (for short, YOUNG_ADULLLT).[1] They draw on a large and coherent corpus of empirical evidence

collected and analysed between 2016 and 2019, covering several aspects of LLL and the social conditions of young adults in the first decade after their age of majority, that is, between 18 and 29. The project was designed as a *comparative study* focusing on Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Italy, Germany, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom and brings together institutional and policy analyses; quantitative and qualitative research with young adults, employers and trainers/providers of education/training; cross-national comparisons of macro socioeconomic data on labour market and education and training; and in–depth case-study analyses of selected regions and LLL topics (see also Chapter 1, in this volume). The chapters included in this volume attempt to make sense of evidence from different sources. The analyses have integrated more than one of these sources and only a few chapters use one of them exclusively.

The data sets on which the chapters draw include, first, a *quantitative data set* with key aspects of the regional overall conditions of the population on NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) Level 2 (that is, at subnational level) was created in order to try to understand the contextual structure of enablements and constraints for young people, but also for policy makers. Data come from pre-existing national and international databases – including Eurostat, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the European Labour Force Survey and European Social and Income Conditions – and were supplemented with local and regional data to account for specificities. In order to assure the validity of the comparisons across groups and time, a configurational invariance test was performed to check measurement invariance across the time span. The data for this analysis was collated for more than a ten–year span (from 2005 up to 2016), and focused on young adults, defined as individuals aged between 18 and 29 years, using, however, a pragmatic plurality of age ranges to overcome data limitations and select sound indicators. Analysis was conducted for 31 variables that aimed at assessing the mediating role of living conditions in LLL policy-making (see Chapter 9, in this volume).

Second, researchers designed *qualitative interview research* for three different groups. For all groups, common schedules were designed in English and subsequently translated into the diverse languages of the participating countries. The interviews were transcribed in the original language, but the researchers shared short two-page summaries in English. Coding was discussed and accorded in both online and face-to-face workshops. *Biographical interviews with young adults* (N = 164) introduced the interest in LLL in the most open way possible, so

that respondents felt free to elaborate on their own narrative. Further questions simply asked for clarification of interviewees' previous comments, and ultimately, mentioned some cross-cutting themes that they had sidelined. *Semi-structured interviews with managers and street-level professionals* (N = 121) were conducted that focused on the interaction of LLL policies and young adults' specific living conditions. These experts were allowed to present their views quite openly, but eventually, all of them were asked a similar set of questions. Finally, *semi-structured interviews with key regional policy makers and stakeholders* (N = 81) aimed at *analysing skills supply and demand* in local skills ecologies.

Third, researchers compiled a *data set for analysis of policy documents* that focused on orientations (interests, frames of reference) that influence skills and LLL policies and activities for young adults. The total corpus of documents (N = 129) came from grey literature and the institutional websites of public employment services, municipalities, chambers of commerce and any other relevant policy actors. The corpus also included other documents that expert interviewees had themselves mentioned.

Fourth, *comparative case studies* (N = 18) were conducted to analyse LLL policies and programmes at the regional and local level, identifying policy-making networks involved in shaping, formulating and implementing LLL policies for young adults. The case studies integrated the different data sets and methodologies and aimed at yielding knowledge on different patterns of policy-making in LLL by applying an interpretive approach to policy analysis (see Chapter 11, in this volume).

The chapters in this volume elaborate on the theories and methodologies that guided these research activities. In fact, the three parts of this book structure the findings through the perspective of strands of scholarship such as research on life courses, analyses of governance and theories of the cultural political economy. The next section provides an overview of the chapters.

Overview of the chapters

Between 2016 and 2019, the research analysed LLL policies addressed to young adults in 18 functional regions (FRs) located in the EU. Some chapters elaborate on the conceptual and methodological premises of the study. Others look into the definition of FRs and the observation of their socioeconomic conditions.[2]

Chapter 1 by Marcelo Parreira do Amaral presents and discusses the conceptualisation of the research. The research on LLL policies

supporting young adults drew from recent theoretical developments including life course research, governance studies and the cultural political economy. Parreira do Amaral argues that these three complementary entry points help us identify and analyse the various aspects in their interplay of discourses, levels, actors and expectations, that is, spanning the topic from macro structures to micro issues. The chapter also describes the implementation of a mixed-method approach along sub-studies that generate complementary insights as different phenomena interwoven with the research object are analysed by approaching them from different viewpoints.

Chapter 2, 'Coordinated policy-making in lifelong learning: functional regions as dynamic units', by Marcelo Parreira do Amaral, Kevin Lowden, Valeria Pandolfini and Nikolas Schöneck, argues that FRs provide a useful concept to understand differences in the planning and implementation of education, the labour market and economic policies at regional/local level. The concept (FR) focuses on functional links that shape dynamic rather than administrative territories. The chapter discusses the implications with regard to a couple of illustrations of coordinated policy-making in the field of LLL.

Yuri Kazepov, Ruggero Cefalo and Mirjam Pot investigate in Chapter 3 the relationship between social investment (SI) and LLL, discussing how LLL can be integrated within a coherent SI strategy. They argue that the ideational principles and policy strategies of these approaches present significant overlaps, but also certain institutional complementarities that may underpin sound integration of labour market, education system and welfare state policies.

Chapter 4 by Xavier Rambla, Dejana Bouillet and Borislava Petkova deliberates on young adults as target groups of LLL policies. The chapter discusses the consequences of constructing these target groups of LLL policies in nine member states as well as the whole EU, and in specific FRs. In addition, the chapter explores to what extent the construction of these target groups draws on wider societal classifications of socioeconomic background (e.g. previous school performance), gender and ethnicity.

In Chapter 5, Queralt Capsada-Munsech and Oscar Valiente aim at proving an understanding of how national education and training systems provide different opportunities for young adults across socioeconomically diverse regions within and across countries. The chapter also addresses how actors involved in socioeconomically diverse regions adapt national education and training systems and LLL policies to the regional/local context, to support young people's skill formation and later transition into the labour market.

Risto Rinne, Heikki Silvennoinen, Tero Järvinen and Jenni Tikkanen argue in Chapter 6 that policies have a vision of a desired society with rational individuals, which is built on a conception of a good or reasonable order of things. They argue that although much is discussed about individualised life courses, there is an underlying implicit norm concerning the characteristics of the desired life course. They aim at making visible the underlying assumptions and tacit implications beneath the 'normal' life course, how vulnerability is produced in policy texts and how the normalisation of so-called 'vulnerable youth' is governed. The chapter uses policy documents and interviews with policy experts and young adults from two Finnish regions.

In Chapter 7, Thomas Verlage, Valentina Milenkova and Ana Bela Ribeiro concur that currently the number of disadvantaged groups is increasing. Most at-risk youth have the fewest life choices. Often, their lives are marked by discrimination, physical disabilities, lack of education and employment, illness, lack of legal rights and other historically rooted practices of domination and marginalisation. Against this background, the chapter puts forward a review of the most recent key policy measures for equal education opportunities and social inclusion targeting the risk groups. Various aspects of adopted policy interventions for stimulating social and LLL inclusion are illustrated, and supplemented by a critical analysis in different EU countries. The conclusion is that the stakeholders have formulated the required strategic actions to guarantee educational equity for marginalised social groups, yet certain shortcomings continue to plague practical implementation.

Siyka Kovacheva, Judith Jacovkis, Sonia Startari and Anna Siri bring young people's voices to the fore in Chapter 8. Young adults' narratives of their trajectories through institutions and social structures are used as the starting point to grasp subjective interpretations of the individual life courses of participants in learning programmes beyond school and the ways in which this participation shapes their aspirations and life projects. The authors deal with the challenge of illuminating the complex relationship between individual agency and the social time and place in which young people's lives unfold.

Chapter 9 by Rosario Scandurra, Kristinn Hermannsson and Ruggero Cefalo aims at providing an understanding of the contexts within which young people develop their biographies and transition to adulthood, and the link to the structures of opportunities and constraints such contexts provide. The chapter provides a comparative assessment of contextual living conditions and risk profiles of young adults in nine European countries and in 18 selected regional contexts.

The authors raise our awareness of the relevance of comparable data at the regional and local level, in order to overcome methodological nationalism and provide a more refined interpretation of social dynamics. By doing this, they stress the increasing need for more contextualised information in different social domains.

Tiago Neves, Natália Alves, Anna Cossetta and Vlatka Domović deal in Chapter 10 with the changing meanings of LLL policies and deliberate on the consequences for young adults and their life courses. The chapter discusses the tensions identified in the contemporary 'growth and inclusion' agenda for a so-called 'knowledge-based economy' as proposed by European strategies. The local assessment of these implications in nine European countries enables a comparative approach that renders common issues and diverging developments visible.

In Chapter 11, Mauro Palumbo, Sebastiano Benasso and Marcelo Parreira do Amaral argue for an interpretive approach to policy analysis in the field of LLL. The authors draw on case-study research in YOUNG_ADULLLT and pay particular attention to the narrative strategies adopted for the case analysis. They discuss three distinct narrative strategies of telling the story of a case while attending to various perspectives on the policy-making process and the varying entry points as well as to relational aspects. The chapter suggests how storytelling as policy analysis can help us advance from case to knowledge, for instance, by overcoming a one-sided perspective of policy-making to include addressees' viewpoints in understanding policy-making while accounting for the complexity that characterises it on the ground.

The concluding chapter by Siyka Kovacheva, Xavier Rambla and Marcelo Parreira do Amaral takes stock of the insights developed in the other chapters of the book and enquires into how LLL policies are impacting and supporting young adults in their life courses. In 'Navigating LLL policies in Europe: impacting and supporting young adults' life courses', Kovacheva and colleagues discuss how policies, in trying to cope with the complexities of contemporary societies, often attempt to normalise or re-standardise life courses, at the same time that life trajectories of young people become more and more diverse and dynamic. A further elaboration refers to the regional dimension of the insights yielded in different chapters on this volume. The chapter closes with remarks on what it means when LLL policies earnestly attempt to support young adults to find and pursue their personal goals – or as they write – navigate the difficult waters to find and reach their Ithaca.

In this vein, we invite you to follow the journey of young people across Europe as they brave the seas of social change to actively engage with LLL.

Notes

[1] The YOUNG_ADULLLT project has received funding from the EU's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No 693167. More information at: http://www.young-adulllt.eu/

[2] Quotes from interview material will be referred to by means of codes such as 'E_AT_V_1' for experts' and 'Y_IT_M_2' for young adults.

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PART I

Lifelong learning between knowledge and economy

Lifelong learning policies for young adults in Europe: a conceptual and methodological discussion

Marcelo Parreira do Amaral

Introduction

Since the beginning of the new millennium, lifelong learning (LLL) policies have become significant tools in tackling ongoing economic and social structural problems. Across European communities, major programmes have highlighted the need for an education that is lifelong and life-wide. The overall objective has been building 'an advanced knowledge-based society, with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, while ensuring good protection of the environment for future generations' (EP and CEU, 2006: 48). In this policy context, ensuring the overall prosperity and well-being of European citizens has become largely dependent on the LLL education and training opportunities provided by national and local/regional governments. Subsequently, much attention has been paid to optimising the reach and efficacy of LLL programmes across European countries by means of policy transfer of 'best practices', often disregarding the contextual conditions for implementation on the ground. What has also become apparent over the course of time is that the role of young adults as active shapers of LLL and their life courses is largely missing, and more often than not, they are viewed as passive recipients. This is true for young people in general since they struggle with several challenges at the same time – developmental, personal, educational, professional and so on – but is particularly relevant for groups facing difficult situations and at risk of social exclusion. Furthermore, the highly diverse and dynamic life projects of young adults are not necessarily or completely consistent with societal expectations. Against this background, researching the compatibility of the objectives of LLL policies and young adults' life projects and living conditions becomes crucial in assessing policies' ability to succeed at local and regional levels.

To ensure the success of LLL policies in Europe, such policies have to reconcile numerous concurrent aspects related to their different contexts, timeframes, target groups and the specific issues they confront. Failing to recognise these specificities risks producing unintended effects and/or exacerbating the problems they intend to tackle in the first place. Additionally, LLL policies may have a substantial impact on the life courses of young adults as the policies are often formulated at the national level while having to unfold at the regional level. Generally, they do not take into account the specific needs, social and living conditions and regional/local infrastructures in education and labour markets.

This chapter discusses the comparative multi-level as well as multi-method approach used in the YOUNG_ADULLLT project for analysing interplays of (un)intended effects concerning the individual, structural and institutional dimensions of policies in 18 selected regional contexts throughout nine European countries. We argue that the effects policies have are best researched at local and regional levels. Policies impact young adults in local/regional contexts of economies, labour markets and education systems. Our approach takes different analytical dimensions – individual, structural and institutional – into account by using different qualitative and quantitative methods to address the diverse research questions.

This chapter is organised into three sections: the first introduces conceptual considerations drawn from life course research (LCR), governance studies and cultural political economy (CPE) that help us identify and analyse various aspects across countries, including their interplay of discourses, levels, actors and expectations, that is, spanning from macro structures to micro issues. The second describes the implementation of a mixed-method approach along sub-studies that generate complementary insights as we analyse different phenomena interwoven with our research object by approaching them from different viewpoints. The third reflects on the possibilities, conditions and limits of producing comparative multi-level knowledge that is relevant for policy-making.

Policies supporting young adults: conceptual entry points

Theoretical perspectives furnish the lens with which the research object – LLL policies that frame young adults' transition from schooling to work – is examined and conceptualised. This tripartite approach underscores the intertwining of LLL policies and young adults in different living conditions throughout European landscapes.

The research analyses different types of LLL policies regarding their apparent competing – and possibly contradicting – objectives for young adults. In addition, the intended and unintended impacts of LLL policies on young adults at regional/local European levels are brought into focus. By framing the research object in this manner, three entry points come to the fore: LLL policies, their target groups and the different regional/local contexts. With regard to the *conceptualisation of the theoretical perspectives*, the different entry points referred to represent different analytical dimensions (institutional, individual, structural) aimed at adequately accounting for the various thematic and analytical dimensions of the research object.

While the extent to which LLL policies are effective/ineffective for young adults' needs in constructing a meaningful life course is best analysed using LCR, the coordination of different actions and agents partaking in these LLL policies – and presumably influencing young adults in their decision-making processes – is best analysed with the help of GOV. CPE is best used to describe the different objectives of LLL policies and in particular the intended impact of LLL policies at national, regional and local levels. Therefore, an understanding of the research objectives is based upon a set of assumptions provided by LCR, GOV and CPE to guide the research and orient the interpretation of the results accordingly.

The remainder of this section is divided into three parts that explain how theoretical perspectives contribute to the project and discuss the resulting implications for empirical research.

CPE

In Europe, a vast number of LLL policies for young adults have been designed and implemented in the framework of overall strategies intended to meet the challenges of creating and improving economic growth and at the same time guarantee social inclusion. Among the policies and initiatives targeting young adults at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary education levels there are substantial differences in scope, approach, orientation and objectives. There is much variation in the way policy makers understand and construct their target groups, namely young adults. Two underlying assumptions are of particular importance when discussing LLL policies for young adults in the context of current strategies. First, the target groups implied in LLL policies are neither natural nor static categories that can be used by policies to 'address' particular groups and social issues. Rather, policies significantly change and sometimes even construct the target group

they address. Second, policies with different orientations and objectives will understand and construct their target groups in substantially different ways. This raises questions regarding the mutual compatibility of the policies and their potential effects for young adults, including direct or indirect side effects.

We adopted a CPE approach as one of our main theoretical perspectives for the critical interrogation of the orientation of LLL policies in Europe. CPE represents an attempt to combine contributions from critical political economy and critical discourse analysis from the field of policy studies (Jessop, 2004; Sum and Jessop, 2013). Jessop defines CPE as:

> An emerging post-disciplinary approach that highlights the contribution of the cultural turn to the analysis of the articulation between the economic and the political and their embedding in broader sets of social relations. (Jessop, 2010: 337)

CPE uses a diverse set of concepts and methods drawn from different social sciences, mainly economics, political science and sociology. In its application to the education field, a CPE approach is interested in the interplay between the politics of education and education politics. In other words, it is interested in investigating the rules of the game, the paradigmatic settings that set the limits to what is considered possible and desirable from education (for instance, the understanding of the role of education in economic neoliberalism) and how these rules of the game shape the who and the how of policy-making in education.

CPE integrates analysis of concrete interactional realities (through critical discourse analysis) with the analysis of underlying political economy trends, their translation into hegemonic strategies and projects, and their institutionalisation into specific structures and practices. Although CPE is mainly applied in the field of political economy, its general propositions and the heuristic that it informs can also be applied to fields like education policy analysis by combining the same semiotic analysis with concepts appropriate to educational institutions, processes and practices.

The CPE approach highlights the importance of the cultural dimension – understood as semiosis or meaning-making – in the interpretation and explanation of the complexity of social formations such as policies. CPE is interested in the study of policy discourses, economic and political imaginaries, their translation into hegemonic strategies and projects, and their institutionalisation into specific

structures and practices. CPE emphasises that explanations of social reality need to focus on the dialectic relationship between the discursive and material elements of social life rather than just on its discursive aspects.

The concepts of hyper-complexity, complexity reduction and imaginaries play an important role in CPE's approach. *Hyper-complexity* maintains that it is impossible to observe and explain the natural and social worlds in real time. CPE distinguishes the existing economy as the chaotic sum of all economic activities from the imaginatively narrated 'economy', as a more or less coherent subset of these activities (Jessop and Oosterlynck, 2008). *Complexity reduction* is a means of distinguishing what is 'going on' in the world. Since it has both semiotic and structural aspects, complexity reduction turns meaningless and unstructured complexity (hyper-complexity) into meaningful complexity (social construal) and structured complexity (social construction). The product of complexity reduction processes are *imaginaries* (social, political, economic). An imaginary is a semiotic system that gives meaning and shape to the social and natural world, working as a theoretical representation and as a powerful strategic policy model in several fields of social practice. It is important to highlight the idea of technologies as 'social practices that are mediated through specific instruments of classification, registration, calculation, and so on, that may discipline social action' (Jessop, 2010: 339). For CPE, technology is not concerned with the productive forces involved in the appropriation and transformation of nature (as in orthodox political economy), but with the mechanisms involved in the governance of conduct. In this context, it understands that technologies (in this case, policies, policy formulation, decision techniques, policy instruments and policy evaluation) are important instruments deployed by agents within the process of selection and retention of policy discourses.

The main contribution of the CPE approach to education policy analysis is the need to take seriously the importance of the mobilisation of policy ideas, and the perceptions of political actors, in the explanation of education policy dynamics and policy outcomes. Policy makers are thrown the world in its complexity and need to selectively attribute meaning to some aspects of the world rather than others. They encounter different pre-interpretations of the world and must engage with some of them in order to make sense of the environment in which they make policy decisions, and so they end up relying on existing meaning systems (policy discourses, political and economic imaginaries). These acts of meaning–making (construals) may also contribute to the constitution of the social world insofar

as they guide a critical mass of self-confirming actions premised on their validity.

This attribution of meaning to social problems and policy solutions opens the door for infinite policy variation and innovation, but we know that not all policy innovations have the same opportunities to be selected, retained and institutionalised, that is, to become concrete policies. The critical nature of CPE serves the de-naturalisation and re-politicisation of LLL policies as taken-for-granted discourses and practices. Therefore, the CPE approach not only helps us raise questions about how LLL policies reflect selective interpretations, explanations and solutions of social, economic and political problems that are formulated by specific groups of actors, it also sheds light on how LLL policies are being legitimated or 'sedimented' within social structures.

According to Jessop (2010), all institutional transformations can be explained by the iterative interaction of material and semiotic factors through the evolutionary mechanisms of variation, selection and retention. These three mechanisms can help to explain why and how some policy reforms emerge, are selected and get embodied in individual agents or routinised in organisational operations, are facilitated or hindered by specific social technologies, and become embedded in specific social structures ranging from routine interactions via institutional orders to large-scale social formations. By applying the CPE approach to the analysis of LLL policies in Europe, we look at how the evolutionary mechanisms of variation, selection and retention shape the social dynamic of adoption, re-contextualisation and implementation of global policy ideas in different national contexts. *Variation* refers to the process by which dominant educational policy discourses or practices need to be revisited due to the emergence of new narratives that problematise educational processes by referencing either external (e.g. economic crisis) or internal challenges (e.g. school dropouts). *Selection* implies the identification of the most suitable interpretations of existing problems, as well as the most complementary policy solutions. These solutions tend to vary from place to place due to their different political economy structures and the pre-eminence of particular ideological coalitions. Finally, *retention* requires the institutionalisation of these new policies through their inclusion in regulatory frameworks and governance technologies, and their enactment through the reinterpretation, acceptance and/or resistance of implementers and practitioners at different levels. The three evolutionary mechanisms of variation, selection and retention offer a productive operationalisation of the CPE approach to the

analysis of LLL policies for young adults in European countries. These three mechanisms can help us explain why and how some LLL policy reforms emerge, are selected and become embodied in different ways within different national and local contexts. The next section discusses LCR.

Life course

The individual level of the research has been conceptualised with the help of LCR (Elder et al, 2003; Heinz et al, 2009; Meyer, 2009). Life course is colloquially understood as the documentation of the stages through which individuals pass along their lives, especially institutionalised stages such as school, training, military/civil service, work and so on. Sociological LCR analogously defines life course 'as a social institution […] in the sense of a rule system that orders a central realm or a central dimension of life' (Kohli, 1985: 1, own translation). The concept of life course may be contrasted with that of biography, where life course points to an institutionalised construction of (culturally defined) patterns of 'female' or 'male' (normal) lives. A biography can be regarded as the 'narrated life', that is, a subjective meaning-making with regard to one's individual life course.

LCR highlights the need to consider how individual lives (the biography) are embedded in institutional macro-social framings (the life course) such as the labour market, welfare and education/training programmes, but also in ephemeral framings like social inequality. A life course perspective differs from other theoretical approaches that address the different life stages. For example, it could be contrasted to the concept of 'biography', which is based on the so-called 'narrated life', that is, the way in which individuals subjectively make meaning of their life trajectories and how they perceive their own experienced life stages. It could be further contrasted to the concept of 'life cycle', which understands the individual life as a linearly developing process in normative age-related stages. In contrast to these concepts, the life course concept assumes that the individual life is not linearly developing, but rather fragmented. Moreover, it is not only institutional contexts that play a major role in defining people's life courses, but it is the young adults themselves who actively shape and form their lives, thereby highlighting how the uniformity of linearity neglects individuals' choices as well as their interrelation with structure and agency (cf Walther, 2006). Within this context, YOUNG_ADULLLT aimed at examining to what extent policies recognise the vastly diverse living conditions of young adults across

Europe, and their plurality in terms of youth cultures, life styles, life projects, professional choices and trajectories in the labour market, in particular with reference to gender, migration and other dynamics (Nilsen et al, 2012; Field, 2013). Thus, this theoretical perspective invites us to consider the young adults themselves, their diverse living conditions, their life projects as well as whether their perceptions and expectations are taken into account by policies. In conclusion, a multi-level perspective on life courses aims at addressing the challenge of placing life courses in a range of wider contexts, from the local/ regional to the European level. This is particularly challenging considering the comparative approach of the YOUNG_ADULLLT project, together with the multidimensionality, uncertainty and de-standardisation of contemporary life courses. The following section deals with the governance perspective.

Governance

In order to support young adults in precarious situations who are often experiencing difficult transitions from schooling to the labour market, a great number of LLL policies, programmes and initiatives have been set up across different administrative levels, from the local to the European. These policies, however, have been subject to review and recurrent criticism in policy debates regarding their fragmentation and ineffectiveness. Such claims state the lack of coordination among policies is the result of their inefficiency. The interrelations relevant for the policies to be most effective include actors, that is, relevant stakeholders, system levels, modes of coordination as well as the cooperation between different policy sectors (e.g. education policies, social youth policies and labour market policies). The degree of interrelation is complex and multilayered, thus revealing the need for effective and efficient coordination among policies as they have a great impact on economic growth and social inclusion. A particular result of LLL policies is the enabling of their target groups, young adults, to enter the labour market successfully. As a theoretical perspective, governance provides a useful lens to frame the aforementioned phenomena as it recognises important shifts in perspective within the political field (Rhodes, 1997; Pierre and Peters, 2000; Benz, 2004). These shifts in perspective refer to the coordination of social activities for which traditionally terms such as 'steering', 'governing', 'control' and 'interdependence' had hitherto been preferred. In the social sciences, governance indicates a significant shift in perspective, 'namely from actor-centeredness to an emphasis on regulatory structures'

(Schuppert, 2006: 374, own translation). Renate Mayntz refers to governance as comprising all forms in which public and private actors, separately or jointly, aim to produce common goods and services and solve collective problems. In her opinion, 'Governance means the sum of all concurrent forms of collective regulation of social issues: from the institutionalized self-regulation of the civil society, through the diverse forms of cooperation among state and private actors, up to the action of sovereign state agents' (2004: 66, own translation; see also Mayntz, 2009; Bevir, 2011). This perspective helps us to address issues of coordination of action among the different agents within the state, the economy, the labour market, civil society and, not least, young people. In other words, governance offers us a conceptual tool to understand the interactions of different actors, at the different levels, and with different mandates, competences and varying degrees of leverage power at their disposal.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that all theoretical approaches have their own blind spots and reflect a selective view of reality and of social relationships. For this reason, complementary theoretical perspectives were chosen to shed light on selected aspects and processes on the three thematic entry points. Thus, by adopting these theoretical lenses the primary goal was to enquire about the complicated and intertwined relations that accompany the processes of formulation and implementation of LLL policies under concrete local and regional conditions. The following section presents the adopted design and discusses the methodological requirements and decisions taken.

Multi-level comparative analysis: methodological discussion

The different conceptual and theoretical perspectives of the research object previously discussed as a multi-level analytical framework were translated into a methodological perspective and research strategy using a set of combined methods and procedures for collecting and analysing data.

In the following section, we describe the research strategy of the project as a multi-method and multi-level approach and explain the implications for the methodology and the analysis, including their implementation. The contextualisation of each object of research in global/national/regional/local cultural traditions and conceptions was taken into account in our international comparative research approach, which aimed at assessing the possibilities and limitations of comparing different research sites within the European landscape.

Research design: multi-level and multi-method comparative analysis

The focus of the YOUNG_ADULLLT research brings to attention the interrelation of LLL policies and young adults in different realities across Europe. Departing from such a complex conceptualisation of the issues requires a research strategy that combines various theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches in a comparative multi-level analysis. In terms of theoretical conceptualisation, the different entry points illustrated represent different analytical dimensions of the research object, as discussed in the previous section.

In terms of methodology, adequately taking into account the various dimensions of the research object implied discerning different analytical levels – individual, structural and institutional – which in turn entails using different – qualitative and quantitative – methods to address the various research questions. For example, capturing young adults' perceptions of underlying social expectations of LLL policies is best achieved by means of qualitative methods such as biographical narrative interviewing. Accounting for the diverse living conditions of young people in their specific regional/local area is most adequately realised by means of quantitative data analyses. Figure 1.1 illustrates these different thematic entry points and relates them to the different analytical dimensions of the research object at hand.

In the following paragraphs, we describe the application of a multi-method and multi-level approach and explain the ensuing methodological and analytical implications. Methodological issues are highlighted, including the research design and its implementation, followed by methods applied at each level. The embeddedness of the research object in its global/national/regional/local cultural traditions and conceptions is taken into account in the international comparative research approach, providing a methodological reflection of the comparative approach.

The multi-method approach is described according to the three phases of the research process. In doing so, we start from the multi-method approach, first, by outlining its implementation in the project; second, explaining the characteristics and advantages of the multi-method approach; and third, specifying the implementation of the methods. Finally, we describe how the multi-level approach draws together the different phases of the research.

The implementation of the research design in YOUNG_ADULLLT unfolded in three phases using different methods and data according to the multi-level and mixed-method approach.

Figure 1.1: YOUNG_ADULLLT's thematic entry points and analytical dimensions
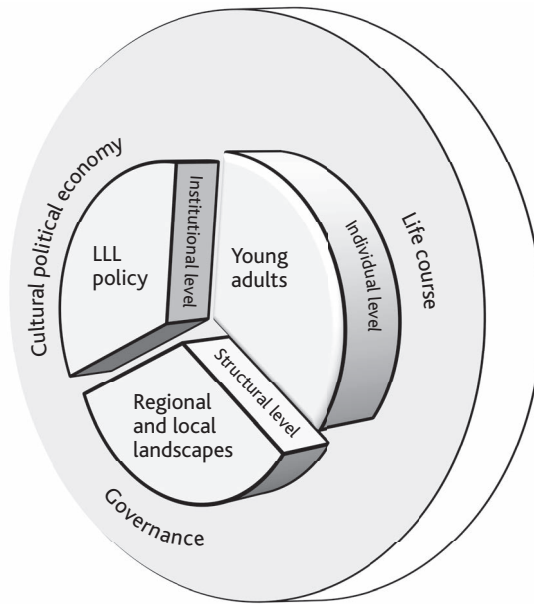
First, the *launching, conceptualisation and policy-mapping phase* is used to clarify the research objectives and design a common research framework, ensuring the latter's compliance with ethical standards and codes of good conduct. The mapping and analysing of the LLL policy field on a national and international level provides sensible indicators for the analysis of national and regional LLL policy strategies. Second comes a *data collection, treatment and analysis phase* comprising a quantitative analysis of young adults' living conditions, qualitative research with young adults and a comparative analysis of skills' demand and supply in conjunction with the labour market. These are followed by regional/local case studies, analysing and bringing together policies and policy-making, including data and results from the previous empirical phase (see Introduction, in this

Figure 1.2: Phases of the research process in YOUNG_ADULLLT
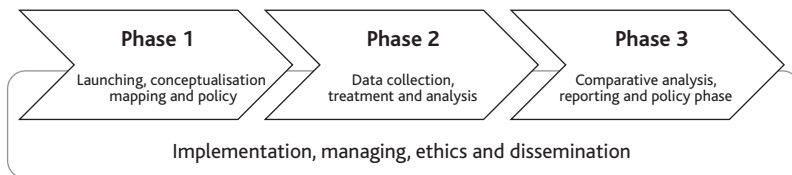
volume). Third, a *comparative analysis, reporting and policy phase* draws together empirical results from the previous phases for comparative cross-case and cross-national analyses as well as the preparation and implementation of policy roundtables in each participating country, in order to produce European/national/regional/local briefing papers and disseminate the project's findings via a thorough communication and publication strategy.

These phases of the research process are implemented according to a specific use of methods, data collection and their analysis. As discussion of methods is central for the scope of the research object, the subsequent paragraphs discuss the applied mixed–methods approach in depth, followed by its implementation as part of YOUNG_ADULLLT.

Mixed methods combines different types of methods and different types of data (Brannen, 2005: 4) and is defined as a procedure of data collection and analysis that combines or 'mixes' quantitative as well as qualitative data in a single study (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). The combination of different data within one study is based on the assumption that singling out one method is not sufficient to answer a specific research question. Hence, an integration of methods is required when the research question itself is rather complex, and different kinds of data are needed to answer it (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009: 29). When using both quantitative and qualitative methods in combination, they mutually complement one another and combining their strengths leads to a rather robust analysis.

Mixed methods offer a practical alternative and logic of approach that encompasses the various strengths of qualitative and quantitative research methods for a 'needs-based' or 'problem-solving' approach (cf Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 17; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009: 3). This approach goes beyond traditional discussions of selecting research methods for designing and conducting research, as these mostly focus on the duality of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

As both approaches have strengths, mixing and combining their advantages for capturing phenomena in a more comprehensive way is the aim of the mixed-methods approach, bridging the schism between qualitative and quantitative research (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 15). Mixed methods are rooted in the tenets of pragmatism led by a consideration of how well the methodology works when solving given problems (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 18). The focus on the more practical side of research emphasises the idea of finding workable solutions and the practical consequences that result from approaching rather complex research questions with a combination of methods (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 15ff). This 'practical enquiry' as an

outcome of mixed–method research allows us 'to address the needs of research stakeholders and users' (Brannen, 2005: 4) when elucidating the (mis)matches of policy strategies and their implementation at a regional/local level.

Instead of focusing on the predominant position of *one* method – and therefore on a paradigm linked to a specific research culture – Glaser and Strauss (1967) emphasise the inevitable link between the methods *and* the researched questions: 'Primacy depends only on the circumstances of research, on the interests and training of the researcher, and on the kinds of material he [sic] needs for his theory' (18). As a consequence of these rather complex interrelations of competing paradigms, methods and research cultures, pragmatism offers a middle position between the opposing poles in combining confirmatory and explanatory questions (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009: 26) and thus a way beyond research dogmatism. This logic of approach stresses the importance of combining multiple approaches for answering research questions in a comprehensive manner (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 17).

Departing from this mixed–method approach and its implementation in the different sub-studies of the research requires not only a design that encompasses different analytical levels (individual, structural and institutional) and their respective preferred different methods, it also entails conceptualising them as multi-level. A multi-level approach allows us to recognise and account for 'naturally occurring nested, or hierarchical, structures' (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009: 156). In YOUNG_ADULLLT, the entry points at different levels are nested within other levels, for instance, analysing processes of de-standardisation for young adults is framed by socioeconomic and political conditions as well as within institutions. Therefore, from a methodological perspective, this multi-level approach aims at accounting for the interplay of macro structures, regional environments, local institutions and individual expectations, life plans and the informal competences of the addressees of the policies.

As a result, our research used different methods on different levels to capture the complexity of the multidimensional approach with qualitative as well as quantitative data collection and analysis. It aimed at revealing the perspectives of different stakeholders and needs of young adults by means of interviewing experts from policy, employment and training as well as young adults themselves (collecting qualitative data). Moreover, this data was embedded in context-specific information on the macro and micro level from participating countries, such as the socioeconomic conditions and specific living conditions

of young adults. The mixed–method approaches applied prioritise qualitative methods, which are supplemented with quantitative data; thus complementary qualitative and quantitative data were collected.

The incorporation of the different methods in a complementary approach results in a juxtaposition, which generates paired insights as data from the different methods enhance each other (Brannen, 2005: 12). In contrast, triangulation, an often referred to advantage of mixing methods, aims to validate or corroborate different sources of data in order to understand the same phenomenon from different points of view (Brannen, 2005: 12). The various entry points were used to understand different phenomena interwoven with our research object by approaching them from different points of view. In order to do so, the incorporation of mixed methods at the different levels occurred at two specific moments during the integration of the approach: at the experiential (methodological/analytical) stage and at the inferential stage (cf Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009: 145f).

According to the multi–level mixed–method approach, two stages of data integration were implemented in our research. First, an integration of different data as a process of exchange between the different sub-studies at the *experiential stage*. At this stage, complementary data that were collected and analysed separately with the aim of ensuring that the different dimensions of the research object were captured. Second, the integration of results into case studies and into sub-studies oriented by comparative case-study methodology at the inferential stage. Here, integration of methods/data was implemented to show the interlinkages among results yielded in the previous research steps. Comparative case studies aim at providing more abstract and generalisable explanations in a theory-generating approach by analysing policy patterns in selected cases as well as the structural relationships, functional matching(s) and specific embedding of LLL policies in regional contexts (see also Chapters 2 and 11, in this volume).

In sum, the multi–level mixed–method approach adopted allowed us to explore the impact of LLL policies on young people in the participating countries, analysing the embedding of these policies in the local and regional frameworks of education, training and the labour markets with particular attention to actors and networks, dynamics, trends, (mis)matches and redundancies.

Concluding remarks

The conceptual and methodological choices enabled researchers to sharpen their focus on relevant aspects of the analyses and have

helped to avoid redundant work. Importantly, beyond the intended effects, they have also indirectly stimulated further theoretical and methodological considerations.

In terms of the operationalisation, careful conceptualisation of the study inspired researchers to explore new connections between LLL and more global institutional and structural contexts in which LLL is embedded. For instance, research on policy in education and training has traditionally used the nation state as its primary unit of analysis, distinguishing different national institutional specificities, cultures, traditions and structures in education/training, labour market organisation, economy/industry–education/training relations and so on. More recently, however, with changing realities brought about by processes such as internationalisation, Europeanisation and globalisation, the usefulness of static and absolute concepts for explaining our social world, such as the nation state, has been challenged. Against this background, searching for more dynamic units of analysis represented an important task in accounting for a high degree of complexity in the analyses in order to provide accurate information and useful results, as well as for policy-making (see Chapter 2, in this volume). This also involved a discussion of how young people's living conditions are assessed in policy-making (see Chapter 9, in this volume).

Enquiring into the tension between agency and structure has equally raised important questions regarding the integration of young adults' voices in policy formulation, the extent to which young adults interiorise societal values in their agency and, conversely, the extent to which this agency is shaped by the discourse surrounding LLL (for instance, employability and vulnerability) and with what consequences (see Chapters 3, 6 and 7, in this volume). Overall, adopting a mix of theoretical perspectives and their correspondent methodologies has proved essential in strengthening the odds of unearthing more mundane, context-specific knowledge about how young adults navigate the troubled waters of LLL between knowledge and the economy.

In conclusion, the theoretical and methodological choices made have implications for questions as to the feasibility and desirability of transferring these local/regional practices and patterns of policy-making to other settings. Policy transfer or policy learning has become a popular approach in European policy-making, that is, 'a purposeful adoption of policies that have succeeded in other places' (Jacobi, 2012: 393). If, as we have suggested, LLL policies are highly context-specific and therefore best understood in their regional/local

context, the notion of 'policy transfer' is at least questionable. Since LLL policies have been devised for specific contexts, it follows that transfer is highly likely to produce very different outcomes, or even unintended effects in other settings. Instead of aiming to identify one-size-fits-all 'best practices' with regard to LLL policy-making that might be 'transferred' across Europe, the focus on regional and local LLL policy-making at the functional region level suggests that it is preferable to detect different patterns of policy-making and identify *specific* conditions, strategies and necessities for LLL policies to become effective. In addition, the comparative cross-case and cross-national analyses of mismatches, dysfunctionalities and redundancies aim at providing new *general* insights into the structural relationships, functional matchings and specific forms of embedding of LLL policies in the regional economy and labour markets. Thus, identifying local and contextualised 'good practices' is useful for developing a set of more general indicators and parameters – in the sense of a reflexive tool (as opposed to a technocratic one) – for policy makers, which will help them improve coordinated LLL policy-making in their regional/local contexts.

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Coordinated policy-making in lifelong learning: functional regions as dynamic units

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Introduction

Most of our social reality – for instance, education, labour market or welfare statistical information – has traditionally been organised as 'national' phenomena. For this reason, since the 19th century, nation states have been traditionally considered the 'natural' units of analysis throughout social sciences research. However, with changing realities brought about by internationalisation, Europeanisation and globalisation processes among others, static and absolute concepts such as that of the nation state have been challenged with regard to their usefulness for explaining our social world. In international comparative research, more recently, the assumption that the implementation of lifelong learning (LLL) policies is best studied at the regional/local level encouraged a more differentiated examination than the national level allows. By adopting the concept of 'functional region' (FR), our research aimed at conceptually taking into account not only policies' administrative aspects but also their functional dynamics, their interrelations with other units as well as the interaction of different sectoral policies. This chapter argues that FRs provide a useful concept to understand differences in the coordination of policies at the regional/local level; they are thus key in understanding the embeddedness of LLL policies for young adults in the regional/local

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* Although this chapter is the result of intense collaboration among all the authors, we would like to state that Valeria Pandolfini has contributed the section on 'Policy analysis across Europe's regions: accounting for different realities' and 'Policy analysis across Europe's regions in the YOUNG_ADULLLT project'.

interplay between economy, society, the labour market and education and training systems.

In the sections that follow, the first explores the changing global context for policy-making and the implications – conceptual and methodological – for policy analysis. Second, the concept of FR is introduced as an approach that extends beyond the national and better accounts for different realities; this section also discusses different conceptualisations and types. In the third section, the units selected for research in the European YOUNG_ADULLLT project are presented, highlighting functional, and thus dynamic rather than administrative, units as research sites. In order to discuss the value-added and the challenges related to this conceptualisation, two FRs in Scotland are more closely examined before drawing more general conclusions as to the utility of the concept in supporting the formulation of coordinated policy-making in the field of LLL.

Policy-making in a changing global context

Contemporary societies have been heavily impacted by what have been termed internationalisation, Europeanisation and globalisation processes. As a buzzword, the term globalisation has been used to describe the major transformations taking place in modern societies since the early 1970s (Parreira do Amaral, 2014: 118). As a social scientific research topic, it prompted myriad understandings of changes associated with globalisation processes, the quality and pace of these transformations as well as of the implications for the social world. Following David Held and Anthony McGrew:

> Globalization denotes the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of interregional flows and patterns of social interaction. It refers to a shift or transformation in the scale of human social organization that links distant communities and expands the reach of power relations across the world's major regions and continents. (2003: 4)

This understanding of globalisation is useful in calling attention to processes of re-spatialisation and rescaling of human activity, which constitute fundamental transformations in the organisation of social relationships. In terms of *place and space*, the argument is that increasingly social interaction and flows of people, products, symbols and information are no longer occurring in or between

discrete and singular places but in places/spaces that are at once distinct and connected (Castree et al, 2013a, 2013b). In terms of *scale*, research focus has shifted to how the local, regional, national, international emerged in historical and social processes as 'platform[s] and container[s] [for] certain kinds of social activity' (Brenner, 2004a: 9). Thus, social, interactional and relational aspects may be seen as central in understanding globalisation processes and their relevance to policy-making.

The latter stands in contrast to policy analysis' traditionally privileged focus on the modern, territorial nation state and on what national 'governments choose to do or not to do' (Dye, 2017: 2). Policy analysis and its conceptual toolkit reflect the fundamental importance of the territorial nation state for the spatial organisation of human activity and public policy. This territoriality of the state, understood as 'claims to and forms of control over bounded spaces' (McCarthy, 2007: 959), was formally linked to the idea of sovereignty in the Peace of Westphalia. Until the late 20th century, the spatiality of human activity had been marked by processes of territorialisation, which established and cemented the nation state as an almost natural unit of analysis. Territorialisation refers to the 'organization of human activities by fixing them in spatial territory' (Castree et al, 2013c: np), resulting in a world divided into 'contiguous and nonoverlapping areas, each identified with a sovereign state' (McCarthy, 2007: 959). Within these respective territories, states became increasingly important agents in the organisation of human activity through an expanding repertoire of regulatory activities (military defence, economic wealth, cultural identity, political legitimation, social welfare; cf Brenner, 2004b). Taylor perceptively summarised the outcome of this, pointing to the 'container-like qualities' of the modern nation state (1994: 152). While the underlying notion of internal and external sovereignty was rarely achieved, the aforementioned processes of territorialisation resulted in the practice of using the nation state as basic unit of analysis when investigating policy-making. Public policy was seen as *made* by national governments and administrations and largely directed at the organisation of human activity within their 'own' respective territories.

Since the late 1990s, researchers have argued that this basic premise has become more and more inadequate as globalisation entails processes of both *de*-territorialisation and *re*-territorialisation (Brenner, 1999), rendering the relationship between state territoriality, sovereignty and power more complex. *De*-territorialisation refers to the decreasing significance of territory for organising human affairs in general

and more specifically national borders. The extreme case of this development would be what Castells (2009) described as the network society, no longer a space of places, but a space of flows, detached from territory. Nonetheless, while 'powerful new non-territorial forms of economic and political organization in the global domain, such as multinational corporations, [and] transnational social movements' (Held et al, 1999: 9) emerged, territories remain important. However, the latter are being reshaped as the territorial and supraterritorial interact, resulting in processes of *re*-territorialisation (Brenner, 2004a), in which governments are strategic actors. These processes of de- and re-territorialisation entail significant implications for public policy analysis. Political communities can no longer be identified 'as simply discrete worlds or self-enclosed political spaces; they are enmeshed in complex structures of overlapping forces, relations and networks' (Held and McGrew, 2003: 41).

These processes of respatialisation and rescaling imply that policy analysis needs to acknowledge the national scale as but one of several. Depending on the issue, the nation state might continue to present itself as the most relevant context for analysis, but this should not be taken as the exclusive framework of study and analysis.

Departing from the discussion of this changed environment, the following section argues that policy analysis needs to take into account the different contexts in which policy formulation, decision-making and implementation take place. Against this background the potential of the concept of FRs as dynamic units in the development and analysis of LLL policy-making is subsequently discussed.

Policy analysis across Europe's regions: accounting for different realities

The assumption that LLL policies are best studied at the regional/local level invites us to take a more differentiated glance than the national level allows for. Likewise, departing from the principle of subsidiarity in European policy-making, accounting for regional variations becomes central as differences occur among locales not only within but also across countries. Thus, research needs to account for this high degree of complexity in its analyses in order to provide accurate information and useful results. Attempting to overcome a widespread 'methodological nationalism' and accounting for the different levels in which policy is entangled represents a useful way to ensure an adequate and well-rounded conceptualisation and analysis of the research object (Dale and Robertson, 2009).

While data on socioeconomic conditions, welfare, labour markets, and education and training systems is available at national and subnational levels for administrative units in almost all countries, the use of these units in research presents limitations. Functional relations, which are vital to understanding socioeconomic phenomena, are likely to be cut out (Eurostat, 2010: 5) as administrative boundaries are the only basis for delineation. An alternative territorial unit for research is provided by FRs. The next section discusses conceptual distinctions and introduces different types and usages of FR.

FR: conceptual distinctions, types, usages

The concept of FR refers to a subdivision of territories that results from the spatial differentiation and organisation of social and economic relations rather than to geographical boundaries, administrative particularities or to historical developments. FR denotes a relational delineation of space that does not necessarily 'reflect geographical particularities or historical events' (OECD, 2016b: 14) but is drawn with respect to 'spatial flows or interactions of various kind (persons, goods, material, energy, information, etc.)' (Klapka et al, 2013: 2). These functional flows or interactions 'are maximised within the region […] and minimised across its borders'. While self-containment is seen as a defining the criterion of FRs, 'inner patterns of region-organising interactions or flows' (Klapka et al, 2013: 3) can be used to classify differing types of FRs, including nodal flows.

The most common FRs are *local labour market areas* (LMAs) and *functional urban areas* (FUAs) (Klapka et al, 2013: 99). The delineation commonly relies on commuting patterns and aggregates smaller administrative units. So far, data on LMAs is only available on the basis of national statistics, but for several years Eurostat has been looking at whether 'these national LMAs are sufficiently comparable and could be used in a European context' (Eurostat, 2010: 5). FUAs consist of 'densely populated urban centres and adjacent municipalities with high levels of commuting (travel-to-work flows) towards the densely populated municipalities' (OECD, 2016a: 15). In this sense, FUAs are 'nodal regions' (Brown and Holmes, 1971) where the orientation of spatial flows or interactions are centred to or radiate from so-called 'nodes'.
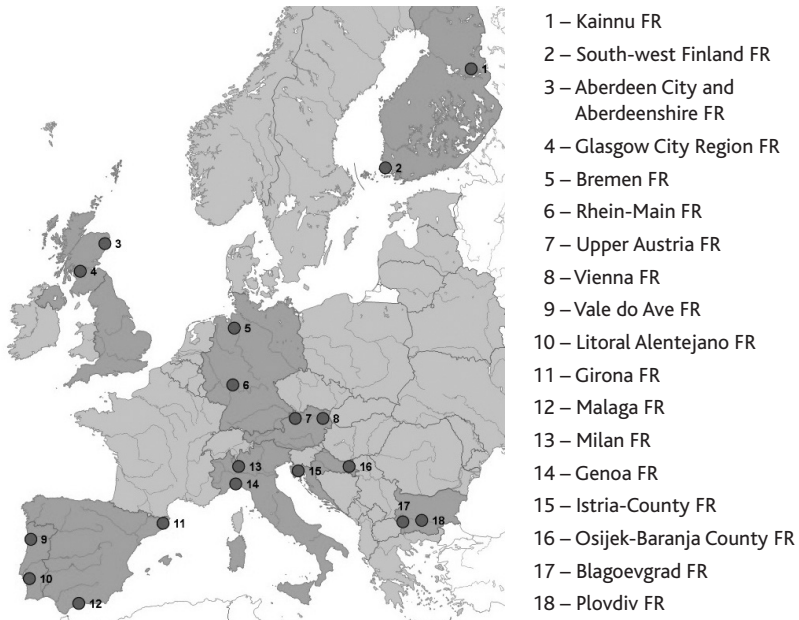
In short, FRs offer a conceptual lens to grasp interactions and flows impacting the overall spatial coordination of labour, education, welfare and, not least, of policy-making.

Policy analysis across Europe's regions in the YOUNG_ADULLLT project

According to the overall objective of the YOUNG_ADULLLT research, each of the nine participating countries selected two FRs (N = 18, see Figure 2.1) to examine the LLL policies/measures chosen as case studies.

The underlying assumption is that regional/local peculiarities produce different skill ecologies, different types of networks and distinct patterns of policy-making, impacting life courses. The FR concept has been adopted on the basis of two related premises: first, LLL policies are highly context-specific and are therefore best understood in their regional/local context; second, the cultural meanings of policies are constructed by different stakeholders in relation to their implementation context and the configurations of actors. In this context FRs offer a major advantage over administrative units as the basis of comparison. The administrative and historical grounds for defining the latter vary widely from country to country, which makes comparability even in terms of population or area hard to achieve (Eurostat, 2010: 5). Moreover, normative regions are more likely to 'cut functional links that are vital to understand

Figure 2.1: Functional regions in YOUNG_ADULLLT

1 – Kainnu FR
2 – South-west Finland FR
3 – Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire FR
4 – Glasgow City Region FR
5 – Bremen FR
6 – Rhein-Main FR
7 – Upper Austria FR
8 – Vienna FR
9 – Vale do Ave FR
10 – Litoral Alentejano FR
11 – Girona FR
12 – Malaga FR
13 – Milan FR
14 – Genoa FR
15 – Istria-County FR
16 – Osijek-Baranja County FR
17 – Blagoevgrad FR
18 – Plovdiv FR

socioeconomic phenomena' (Eurostat, 2010: 5). FRs, on the other hand, as 'different, but comparable, territorial systems', should be seen as a starting point that affords a 'better understanding of the socio-economic dynamics in place' (OECD, 2013: 72) and a rough idea of the relevant territory, which allows further data on the embeddedness of policies to be gathered subsequently.

The majority of FRs selected in YOUNG_ADULLLT were *FUAs*, with densely populated core(s) hosting a variety of employment opportunities, that account for strong linkages with the surrounding areas. In only a few cases were FRs located in (semi-)rural areas characterised by economic specialisations. Many of the selected FRs may be characterised as metropolitan areas consisting of multiple, linked urban cores, which are drivers for economic output, transportation hubs, and cultural and administrative centres. They account for a higher-than-average concentration of services and industries in countrywide comparison; however, the functional relations they display differ in terms of types and density of flows:

- Metropolitan areas especially display a high density of flows. Highly developed infrastructure renders commuting feasible. Examples in YOUNG_ADULLLT include: the two German metropolitan areas of Bremen (roughly 130,000 people commute every day to Bremen, Oldenburg and Bremerhaven) and Rhein–Main (a dense railway and motorway network used by roughly 350,000 commuters); the two Spanish FRs of Málaga (with its metropolitan transport consortium) and Girona (where the Area Public Transport Consortium facilitates geographical mobility within the region); Milan FR in Italy (railway and motorway systems allow people to commute to Milan to study or work); Vienna FR in Austria (180,000 people commute daily to Vienna); and the Bulgarian Plovdiv FR (the city attracts a workforce from a wider region, where more than 1.3 million people live).
- Some FRs are characterised by hubs for business and employment and play a particularly strong economic role in their national context. Examples are: Upper Austria FR (one of the principal centres of industrial production in Austria – particularly steel production and automotive supply); Aberdeen FR in Scotland; the two Bulgarian FRs of Plovdiv (it has a multi-sector economy providing around 7 per cent of the national sales revenue of goods and services) and Blagoevgrad (covering almost all sectors of the national economy).
- Some FRs offer well-established education and training infrastructures with a high concentration of schools and higher

education institutions. In YOUNG_ADULLLT, several FRs are illustrative of this type: Spanish Girona FR (with its higher education district around the Universidad de Girona); Scottish Glasgow City (an important provider of higher educational opportunities on a national and increasingly international level, producing a third of Scotland's graduates); the two Bulgarian FRs of Plovdiv (of national importance with nine universities, 39,260 students and 78 primary, secondary and vocational schools with 8,351 pupils) and of Blagoevgrad (with two universities and three colleges); south-west Finland FR (with two universities in Turku – the capital city of the region – and four universities of applied sciences, as well as 75 post-compulsory educational institutions located throughout the region); Vienna FR in Austria (hosting nine public and four private universities, as well as a teacher training college, accounting together for 170,000 students in addition to another 13,300 students enrolled in the six universities of applied sciences).

- In other cases, an international harbour or airport is the 'nodal point' of a FR, as such infrastructure offers important employment and business opportunities. Examples include: Genoa FR in Italy (a specialised container port to access trans-European and Mediterranean logistic corridors); the Portuguese Alentejo Litoral FR (the city of Sines has one of the biggest deep-water harbours in Europe); the German Rhein–Main FR (Frankfurt airport); and Spanish Málaga FR (Málaga airport).

- In a few cases, FRs are located in predominantly rural areas that display economic specialisations. Examples are: the two Portuguese FRs of Vale do Ave (agriculture, textile industries and logistics industries) and Alentejo Litoral (energy and logistics industries, alongside tourism and agriculture); the Finnish Kainuu FR (wood industry, bio economy and mining industry); and the two Croatian FRs of Istria County (manufacturing industry, tourism, trade, construction, real estate and business services) and Osijek–Baranja County (food-processing industry, cellulose production, paper, cardboard, crafts and trades).

Using FRs to contextualise the case studies contributed to capturing the different subnational realities in terms of education and training, welfare and the labour market. This focus on the specific regional/local landscapes of policy-making allowed the implementation and impact of LLL policies in the specific contexts of the 18 FRs to be analysed, identifying particular constellations of actors and interplays among individual, structural and institutional dimensions. This contributed

to understanding whether and how policy makers, professionals and young people navigate the shifting geographies of LLL and how coordination might work. In the following sections, we provide two examples of how this was done and draw some conclusions on the usefulness of the FR concept in discussing coordinated policy-making in LLL.

Coordinated policy-making: a glance at two FRs in Scotland

Before we present and discuss the two Scottish FRs, it is worthwhile briefly discussing what coordinated policy-making entails. Coordinated policy-making denotes arrangements that successfully integrate labour market, social inclusion and individual life course aspects of policy formulation and implementation at regional and local level. Coordinated policy-making is viewed as an ideal-type sustainable institutional solution that takes account of all relevant actors, stakeholders, dynamics, trends and (mis)matches, avoiding redundancies and creating synergic effects in terms of integrating specific training or educational programmes with broader interventions for specific groups. It coordinates different areas of government (education, labour, economy) and facilitates the involvement of non-governmental actors (business, training institutions, civil society) in the planning, regulation and provision of LLL opportunities in a particular territory.

In more conceptual terms, coordinating policy-making aims at accounting for the embeddedness of human action in institutional, economic, social, political and cultural conditions. Karl Polanyi ([1944] 1957) coined the term to point out the embeddedness of the economy in both economic and non-economic institutions. Later, Mark Granovetter (1985) viewed economic action as 'embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations' (487) and argued that it is these social relations that help us explain outcomes. Embeddedness thus calls our attention to the cultural, cognitive and normative frames of reference, the patterns of (social) relationships, networks and infrastructures available to those aiming for the coordination of action. Thus, understanding how LLL policies relate to these various factors and conditions in a specific site allows us to discern key parameters for achieving better coordination in LLL policy-making.

The two cases examined in Scotland illustrate attempts to better coordinate policy-making in the field of LLL. Furthermore, they allow us to explore how concepts of embeddedness can inform our understanding of processes involved in coordinated policy-making in

these FRs. In particular, the division of labour between policy levels as well as the city region deals are important elements conducive to coordinated policy-making, as will be further discussed.

In terms of political framing, the Scottish parliament has the role of devising and implementing social policy, and welfare, health, education and training, and youth policies, which are closely aligned to one another, reflecting the principles set out in the 'Christie Commission on the future delivery of public services' (Scottish Government, 2011). This reform of Scottish public policy placed an emphasis on partnership working between sectors and services to build public services 'around people and communities, their needs, aspirations, capacities and skills' (23). This holistic approach attempts to enhance policy articulation for greater coherence, impact and more effective use of resources.

National policies in Scotland are designed to operate in tandem to provide strategies to tackle national priorities. For example, the National Youth Work Strategy 2014–2019 (Scottish Government, 2014) contributes to education and skills policies, labour market policies and social policies, but also justice, health, sport, culture and equality policies. Policy enactment in Scotland adopts the so-called 'concordat approach', that is, regional and local policies are localised reflections of national policies, with national government devolving fiscal decisions and strategy prioritisation to local authorities. This system is supported and informed by national and local labour market intelligence and monitoring. This approach, however, also presents practical challenges for policy implementation regarding coordination and coherency among levels, sectors and actors. Within this Scottish context, the concept of FRs, or city regions as they are called in the UK, has played an increasingly important role in devolving national policies through to the regional and local levels.

City region deals are an agreement between the UK government, the Scottish government and member local authorities to create collaborative regional partnerships focused on improving regional economies. Each deal is bespoke to the city region and includes a range of measures designed to operate as a coherent whole. The concept is intended to involve member local authorities working together to combine their individual strengths and capacities. The city regions are also partly motivated by a desire to promote their capacity as entities to compete economically across the UK and internationally. The city regions are seen as the main engine of economic growth, being the market place for goods, services and employment, and centres of innovation and education as well as promoting social and

cultural activity. Since 2003, these city regions have been important for government in driving regeneration efforts and the implementation of major policy initiatives. The governance of a city region is coordinated at the regional level but is intended to allow an individual authority to maintain their own governance structures and local variation of policies in order to ensure local priorities are addressed. In Scotland, it is arguable that the city regions have a distinct nature compared to others in the wider UK in that, while operating to address regional issues and priorities, they can be seen as a key mechanism to implement national policies in contextualised ways. The two FRs selected for the UK component of YOUNG_ADULLLT were Glasgow FR and Aberdeen/Aberdeenshire FR.

Glasgow City Region

The Glasgow City Region's economic strategy was introduced in 2016, with a timetable running to 2030. This city region comprises of eight neighbouring councils: East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City Council, Inverclyde, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire. Councillor Mark Macmillan (Leader of Renfrewshire Council), holder of the Cabinet's Enterprise Portfolio, stated that the establishment of the city region 'recognises the fact that the economies of the Glasgow City Region local authorities are completely interlinked' (Glasgow City Council, 2016, np). In addition to its economic objectives, the city region has a series of strategic social and health targets, including tackling social inequity. While there are some differences in the specific policy-related strategies and projects across the city region, there is a level of coherence in the overarching policy strategies that cut across the overall region. The Glasgow City Region has interlinked local systems and economies, with distinctive social and economic characteristics and challenges. The collaborative responses include social, political and economic interactions among the partner councils and also with the wider UK and internationally.

The wider city region, which has a population of 1.75 million, plays a significant role in Scotland. Largely urban with some farming areas, the city region is an important provider of further and higher educational opportunities on a national and international level and there are important commuter flows from Argyll and Bute, Ayrshire, Stirling and the Edinburgh City Region. A large proportion of the population, particularly in the Glasgow city area, suffers income deprivation compared to Scotland as a whole. Despite the range of

challenges, it is reported that the partnership of councils involved have, since 2003, contributed to notable positive economic impacts. A particular challenge for the region has been to widen participation in the labour market, tackle skills gaps in trades and consumer services as well as sustaining recruitment in social care, tourism and construction sectors. These challenges have strategic implications for the region's colleges as key providers of vocational education and training (VET) (SDS, 2016a).

Aberdeen city and Aberdeenshire

In 2008, the Strategic Development Planning Authority (SDPA) was formed to provide a partnership between Aberdeen city and Aberdeenshire councils to guide development over a 25-year period and establish a European city region. At the time of our analysis, this city region had above-average incomes and relatively low unemployment. However, there has been an economic downturn in the oil industry and resulting job losses. In addition, there are local differences in wealth and opportunity between some of the region's communities. The city region's SPDA aims to tackle these and other challenges in order to enhance employment and quality of life for residents as well as reducing reliance on locally dependent oil and gas jobs. This will include placing an emphasis on communities, public sector organisations and private businesses within a holistic strategy for renewal and development.

Aberdeen is Scotland's third-largest city and the regional centre for employment, retail, culture, health and higher education as well as the region's transport hub. The wider city region has prioritised areas in need of regeneration and includes coastal communities of north and south Aberdeenshire as well as parts of Aberdeen city with social, economic and area-based regeneration initiatives to improve the economy, environmental quality, accessibility, employment opportunities and the competitiveness of business.

There is a functional interdependency between Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen city (Lindsay, 2012) and a high percentage of trade apprenticeships in the two councils. At the time of our analysis, Aberdeenshire ranked third in Scotland for share of working age population with apprenticeship credentials. The Skills Development Scotland's (SDS) Regional Skills Analysis (RSA) report on the Aberdeen/Aberdeenshire skills-related developments over 2014–15 (SDS, 2016b) highlighted that while the city region has been successful since the 2008 crisis:

> There remains … a challenge for the supply of skills to match demand … The new City Deal investment promises further demand for construction and related skills in what has already been a tight labour market … There continues to be a need to focus on diversifying the employment base, and increasing exports, including sector expertise, to reduce reliance on locally dependent oil and gas jobs. The supply of regional skills should help support this process. (SDS, 2016b: 18)

Therefore, while the Glasgow City Region faces greater challenges regarding employment and skills issues, Aberdeen/Aberdeenshire is undergoing rapid economic changes, exacerbated by the downturn in the crude oil market that will require particular policy and practice responses regarding the development of LLL and skills.

In the remaining part of this section, the Community Benefit Clauses (CBCs) policy will be discussed as an example of coordinated LLL policy-making.

The Scottish FRs feature policies developed across the member regions, providing appropriate case studies to illustrate the usefulness of the FR concept in understanding coordinated LLL policy-making. A key example is the CBCs policy. It requires those contracted by local government to contribute to delivering wider benefits in addition to the core purpose of a contract where a procuring organisation is given a contract valued at £4 million or above. These can be used to support local councils' priorities including provision of LLL, skills and employability services. This particular regional/local policy addresses a range of social, economic and educational priorities and helps facilitate the building of infrastructure via funding and support obtained through these requirements.

CBCs are intended to facilitate not only economic growth but also wider social benefits and development. For example, the funding and contributions from contractors help provide targeted training and employment opportunities and educational support initiatives.

CBCs create economic, social or environmental obligations for the delivery of City Deal contracts to ensure that the benefits delivered are aligned to addressing the key economic priorities for the region.

The CBC policy builds on existing practices across the city region authorities to deliver community benefits and is intended to encourage connections between businesses and their communities. It can be argued that this arrangement fosters a sense of social responsibility and engagement for those businesses involved.

The CBC policy is a strong illustration of regional/local manifestation of the Scottish policy framework and stance that advocates partnership and collaboration in order to deliver effective implementation of aligned policies as well as best value for money. The governance and planning of this policy involves: community planning, education services, land and environmental services, legal services and social work services. This policy, therefore, reflects the Scottish collaborative and aligned approach to implementation and monitoring of policies. In principle, this policy framework is intended to help grow the regional and local economy, including the delivery of sustainable employment outcomes for residents. This policy is also meant to help provide resources to address social inequality in communities, which is seen by the government as integral to promoting economic growth. Indeed, the Scottish government has produced its own case studies and independent research demonstrating the effectiveness of CBSs (Sutherland et al, 2015) and the policy's articulation with the National Performance Framework (MacFarlane and Cook, 2008). This research indicated that, overall, this policy has made a positive contribution to targets relating to job opportunities, apprenticeships, work placements and training for priority groups (Sutherland et al, 2015: iii). However, there is variation in the effectiveness of individual contracts and the additionality and sustainability of the CBCs outcomes has been more difficult to calculate because procuring organisations have not typically required their contractors to monitor these aspects (Sutherland et al, 2015). This is interesting given that the original city region plans for the CBCs intended that the benefits included as contractual obligations should be monitored as part of the tender process and successful suppliers are required to provide regular monitoring information outlining the CBC delivery progress. Interviews conducted for the YOUNG_ADULLLT research indicated that there was also variance in actual monitoring data at local council level, sometimes because councils were reluctant to enforce businesses' honouring of their contractual commitments for fear of losing their support and involvement in their community.

While there are similarities in how the CBC policy has been implanted, it is important to note that the research revealed that the LLL and skills policy enactment at the regional level is taking different routes. In the Aberdeen FR, many of these policies are being used to support young adults in transitioning to VET or apprenticeship schemes. In Glasgow FR, the support is mainly directed towards supporting disadvantaged young adults to overcome barriers (e.g. financial, health, family situations) to get back into education, training,

employment or volunteering. Indeed, the Glasgow FR stands out in our research as in only one other FR (south–west Finland FR) are other, more holistic purposes (i.e. social inclusion, self-esteem, mental health) explicitly evident in regional policies. Historically, policies and material actions in the Aberdeen FR have been more focused on providing opportunities that encourage economic development and create new employment in a range of areas that are appropriate and attractive to the needs of different industries, but with a particular focus on the energy sector.

It can be argued, therefore, that localised expression of the CBC policies and resulting opportunities for young adults are strongly related to the socioeconomic context of each region. This context also shapes the range of partners seen as required to enact the policies and actions intended to tackle LLL skills challenges. The scale of disadvantage and related issues has meant that in the Glasgow FR the nature of partnerships has developed to reflect the complexity and interrelated nature of the issues, and includes a diverse range of public, third sector and private organisations. In Aberdeen FR, historically, there has been less disadvantage, higher levels of employment and greater success in attracting youth with high skills levels. However, in recent years, volatility in the energy market has raised questions about the regional skills strategy. Subsequently, the policy actors and partnerships have had to realign and refocus to better support workers who were made redundant. Previously, the main skills actors influencing local policy and strategies were the oil and gas sector employers. Now, however, market uncertainty and its impact on employment and related social issues has seen public, private and third sector actors emerge as key partners, as efforts to achieve the policies are seen to require a more diverse and holistic approach.

As previously stated, using the FR as a unit of analysis in YOUNG_ ADULLLT enables a contextualised focus on regional/local LLL policies, such as the CBC. This facilitates a nuanced understanding of how these policies are enacted from national to local level. It also highlights, especially in the Scottish FR case studies, how the LLL policy process involves numerous interconnected actors and complex vertical and horizontal systems of governance and relational and power dynamics. However, there are particular concepts that can further inform our understanding of how these interconnected actors influence the LLL policy process within the FR.

Discussion – FRs as dynamic units: coordinated policy-making in LLL

Ongoing processes of globalisation, internationalisation and Europeanisation have challenged the ways we conceptualise and analyse policy-making, questioning in particular the usefulness of static and absolute spatial concepts such as that of the nation or region. FR emerges here as a potential dynamic concept with which to understand context- and culture-specific aspects of the policy-making process, as was previously argued.

The two Scottish FRs reveal the interplay between the economy, society, the labour market and education systems. Local priorities and conditions shape not only the focus and nature of the policy enactment but also the range of actors involved. Organisational relationships, while similar in each FR, are shaped by the national and local policy environment, and also influence that environment. For this reason, the theory of embeddedness (Polanyi, [1944] 1957) is relevant and assists our understanding of how these conditions influence the arrangement and activity of the various policy actors. The economic environment clearly shapes the government's priorities and design of policies. However, we find that at regional and local levels, the nature of the resulting material actions and the configuration of local policy-related actors that enact, govern and monitor these policies do not simply reflect an external logic. If a purely economic/market-driven logic or an ideological policy stance was paramount then we would expect to see the policy structures, institutions and their actors arranged and operating in a uniform fashion. However, the nuanced enactment of the CBC policy, and indeed other national policies in Scotland, such as Developing the Young Workforce, illustrates the importance of taking into account the interpretation of context by actors. These actors interrelate and collaborate at different levels, each with varied degrees of influence, power, knowledge and resources. This 'lifeworld' as Habermas (1981) would call it, shapes the actual policy actions and their consequences.

An economic sociological perspective, such as that of Polanyi, therefore, is particularly apposite considering how the regional and local policy actors and institutions are not only influenced by context but influence each other through their relational networks. This is not to ignore or negate the structural impact of economic forces on systems but rather to understand how systems respond to such contexts. To do so, we must take into account the complex social relationships and agency of actors involved at all levels.

We would argue, therefore, that the Scottish examples discussed in this chapter demonstrate the usefulness of the FR concept in understanding coordinated policy-making in the field of LLL, and that certain concepts, such as Polanyi ([1944] 1957) and Granovetter's (1985) thinking on embeddedness, provide valuable analytical frameworks to understand the detailed processes involved. These FRs illustrate how systems that are designed at a national level use coordinated partnership with the intention of translating these policies to suit regional and local needs. Such partnership and devolved policy enactment are key principles of current Scottish policy and require interrelated vertical and horizontal collaborative networks.

At regional and local levels, the principles of the partnership approach have guided coordination between governmental and non-governmental actors. These principles can be found in the 'Christie Commission on the future delivery of public services' (Scottish Government, 2011) and guide partners to work in collaboration as a means of promoting efficient delivery of policies at all levels. The complex nature of Scottish policy requires particular governance approaches across sectors, departments and among the various actors involved. The Scottish government has been devolving responsibility for enacting LLL policies and related actions to regional and local partnership structures including public, private and third sector actors. Scottish LLL policies ultimately rely on effective local partnership for enactment and impact. Such partnership working is seen by policy makers as promoting better alignment of services to support individuals' and employers' needs and more effective sharing of information to facilitate pathways into employment.

The governance and organisation of the enacted policies and material actions are similar in our two examples of FRs, with regional and local partnership boards providing strategic management and monitoring. Local authorities prepare local development plans that cover a wider range of issues in more detail. Also at the local level, Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) play a key role and involve a range of public, private and third sector partners. They use their respective local authority Single Outcome Agreements with government to help identify priorities for LLL and deploy appropriate actions.

The recommended representation of key stakeholder groups such as employers, the third sector, national agencies and local government on regional management groups and local CPPs should, in principle, facilitate communication and sharing of information and ideas to effectively guide the strategies. However, there is a lack of evidence on whether the differing stakeholders work effectively together.

Where governance was reported to be more effective and coherent, stakeholders highlighted the role of good relationships and the presence of historical networking in qualitative feedback from Aberdeen/Aberdeenshire policy representatives during the YOUNG_ADULLLT research.

There are also issues regarding representation of the public in the governance of the city regions. An online research paper from Policy Scotland stated: 'If City Deals are to be made more inclusive, individuals, businesses and communities need to be empowered to participate in and contribute towards how deals are formed and delivered' (Waite et al, 2017: 1). This highlights the importance of participation of all actors in the decision-making processes of the city regions.

Examination of the Scottish FR illustrations moves our understanding of policy enactment beyond a purely spatial and stratified understanding to one that allows recognition of the relational aspects. While the national policy rhetoric extols the importance of partnership working and devolved decision-making to address local priorities, it is arguable that the policy process in the Scottish FRs actually reveals an increasingly centralised system of monitoring and accountability to steer and assess this so-called devolved process. Indeed, policy documentation reveals an increase in central monitoring of partnerships' progress against the strategic targets through national data systems and outcomes-based accountabilities.

Jessop (1997) writes about the regionalisation process and denationalisation of the state, where the activities of the state are dispersed. While this is evident in England, in Scotland we see a more complex process, where regionalisation is framed by the government's centralist concern with ensuring the integrity of national policy. Since the economic crisis, there has been an increase in the collection and use of data on key performance indicators to support the monitoring of progress at local and regional levels by national authorities. For example, the Opportunities for All policy (2012) sets out the requirement for tracking and monitoring individuals as they move through the learning system. In the Developing the Young Workforce project (2014), there are specific outcome-based targets for local authorities, schools, colleges and employers across the seven-year duration of the policy.

Therefore, the policy spaces in the Scottish model, including the FRs and their constituent sub-spaces, can be seen to be comprised of vertical and horizontal relational networks, pathways and partnerships. Here Jessop's (2016) concepts are helpful in understanding why

policy systems are a tangle of networked relations. Theorists such as Lefebvre ([1978] 1991) and Harvey (2006) add that these partnerships are dynamic and stress the importance of relationships among the various actors and their production of ideas and activities.

It is also important to recognise that spaces such as FRs are a manifestation and arena of politics and power. Here the ideas of Doreen Massey are helpful. The social relationships present in networks and partnerships constitute a 'geometry of power' (Massey, 1994: 4). Such spaces are socially produced at various scales and not fixed. Rather, they are dependent upon what networks and actors are present.

In closing, FRs are seen by government and local policy actors as ways to organise and govern policy enactment. The concept of FRs, if they recognise power dynamics present, can be extremely helpful in understanding policy enactment processes including LLL. Rather than fetishising space, we are able to use the FR concept to go beyond the descriptive and explore, within this construct, relational networks with their integral 'power, projects and politics' (Robertson, 2009: 2).

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A social investment perspective on lifelong learning: the role of institutional complementarities in the development of human capital and social participation

Yuri Kazepov, Ruggero Cefalo and Mirjam Pot

Introduction

The increasing educational level of young people, together with changing labour market dynamics, affects school-to-work transitions and young adults' life course in general (Parreira do Amaral et al, 2015). The importance of education in the life course is a view shared across many theoretical approaches, both within and outside educational studies broadly conceived: from the sociology of education (Blossfeld et al, 2014) to pedagogical studies (Walther, 2006), as well as welfare studies (Busemeyer and Nikolai, 2010). In educational research, the lifelong learning (LLL) concept expresses the relevance of education and learning at every stage of individuals' development (Aspin et al, 2012; Milana et al, 2018). Thus defined, LLL encompasses the whole life course of individuals, implying a continuous process of learning in formal, informal and non-formal settings. The 'learning turn' in the field of adult education (Seddon, 2018) produced an emphasis on perpetual learning: all stages of life are seen as requiring education, and at the same time, all areas of life provide learning opportunities (Wyn, 2009). This understanding of LLL relates to the wider context of a 'learning society' or 'knowledge economy' (Lundvall and Lorenz, 2012), and overlaps with the social investment (SI) approach to welfare studies and social policies. The SI perspective considers welfare policies as a productive factor connecting social inclusion strategies and economic growth, designed to ease life course transitions through synergic policy mixes. SI represents a paradigmatic shift, repositioning education to the centre of social policy reforms (Kazepov and Ranci,

2016). Given the priority assigned to education and training activities, SI shares strong connections with the basic principles of LLL. In advocating for an integration of learning experiences along the entire biography, the SI approach is highly coherent with the theoretical framework of YOUNG_ADULLLT, as LLL policies are intended to promote the realisation of young adults' potential in their life course, supporting inclusion primarily by connecting education and work. Within the SI literature, LLL is considered as a component of a coherent SI strategy (Hemerijck, 2017). Nonetheless, there is a lack of theoretical integration between the two concepts. In this chapter, we will explore the common ground underlying both the SI and the LLL approach in order to understand overlapping features and analytical ambiguities characterising the two approaches.

Increased interest in the two concepts is to be understood in the context of the new global economy, where productivity and competitiveness are the result of knowledge generation and information processing. The literature on individualisation and risk societies (Beck, 2000) argues that the new economy provides new opportunities to exert individual agency. In post-industrial learning societies or knowledge economies, individuals are expected to continuously upskill themselves in order to maintain integration in changing labour markets and gain upward mobility. Conversely, more critical approaches stress that the increased dependence on the market negatively affects the condition of less protected groups in the labour market: low-skilled people and those with disadvantaged backgrounds face a greater risk of social exclusion, while socially advantaged individuals are likely to have more freedom to negotiate their biographies. Breen (1997) refers to a process of selective recommodification that increases pre-existing inequalities and transforms life course patterns. On closer inspection, although inequalities among countries are slowly shrinking, inequalities within countries have been rising over the last decades, even in northern European social democratic countries with more universalistic welfare states (Nolan, 2014).

Within the new global economy, LLL and SI strategies may be seen as policy levers available to governments to steer economic growth, and at the same time secure social cohesion. The two approaches differ with regard to the scope and aims of interventions, but also share several common features: indeed both LLL and SI stress the central role of education through the life course, advocating for an integration of learning experiences within the individual's biography. Moreover, the two approaches carry various meanings and implications for different actors, international organisations and countries involved in their

translation into practice (Morel et al, 2012; Riddell et al, 2012). In the case of both LLL and SI, this can lead to different and partially ambiguous interpretations of the relationship between education and the life course.

In what follows, we will focus on the assumptions and policy strategies underlying these approaches, discussing how LLL can be integrated within a coherent SI strategy. According to the SI perspective, the welfare state should prepare individuals to face the challenges of a post-industrial society by means of activation and high-quality services, and not just intervene through traditional passive benefits (for instance, unemployment insurance) to buffer the impact of social risks. However, the time horizon of social policies may produce unpredictable consequences due to the temporal gap between interventions, such as educational provision, and their outcomes, for instance labour market integration. This is supported by recent empirical investigations showing that SI policies may have unintended perverse effects (Cantillon and Vandenbroucke, 2014). We argue that these temporal gaps could potentially be bridged by LLL policies that extend training and learning through the life course. The re-synchronisation of SI policies through LLL policies allows us to identify a holistic and coherent framework underlying social and educational interventions, where the goal of employability is accompanied by a capability-related form of empowerment that respects personal aspirations towards self-realisation (Cefalo and Kazepov, 2018).

In order to explore this framework, the chapter is structured in three parts. In the first and second sections, we present and describe the LLL and SI perspectives, reviewing their foundations. The two approaches present significant overlap and ambiguities which we analytically unpack. Most important for our analysis is the fact that they both display a narrow, 'functionalistic' and market-led human capital approach, in contrast to a 'holistic' understanding of education that addresses issues of social participation and human capabilities. In the third section, we discuss the concept of complementarities – both contextual and institutional – as a critical perspective needed to understand the (pre)conditions influencing the effectiveness of SI strategies. The complex and time-framed interplay between labour market, education system and welfare arrangements presents *relationalities* which are often overlooked. The YOUNG_ADULLLT project contributed to this issue by contextualising LLL policies as investment-related policies at the interface of relevant institutions within functional regions (FRs) (see Chapter 1, in this volume). By

investigating these relationships, in this chapter we go beyond mere consideration of LLL policies as an example of SI policy. We rather argue in favour of the relevance of LLL policies, specifically their role in addressing potential time gaps within the SI perspective which might emerge between investment in education and its supposed positive economic returns.

Between human capital and capabilities: the changing concept of LLL

The concept of 'LLL' was introduced in the 1960s to denote the function of education in relation to individuals' life courses (Bagnall, 1990). It has been variously interpreted in the education literature. A programmatic discourse on LLL developed in association with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Lifelong Education Unit. This position has been labelled as maximalist (Wain, 2001), as it considered lifelong education as involving a fundamental transformation of society, such that the whole society becomes a learning resource for each individual. This discourse takes into consideration the wider cultural, social and political context and conditions under which education and learning are taking place. Progress towards this emancipatory ideal is envisaged by radically rejecting education systems aligned with the needs of capitalism and advocating a paradigm shift in thinking about education (Wain, 2001). In the maximalist vision, education and learning would not be constrained to a certain phase in life, that is, childhood; a certain place, that is, school; nor to the activity of professional teachers (Bagnall, 2012). Instead, the maximalist position argues for an integration of learning experiences across the entire life course. The state plays an important role in this conception as it has to provide the resources for the realisation of this new educational vision.

During the 1970s, this maximalist movement lost UNESCO's support and subsequently its influence in the debate surrounding LLL. Instead, narrower and instrumentalist discourses that linked LLL with further training and professional development gained ground, highlighting a functionalist view of LLL in relation to the labour market. The notion of learning society was reintroduced into the debate at the beginning of the 1990s; however, the main focus of the discourse shifted towards the increasing mismatch between competences acquired during schooling and the competences demanded by a fast-changing economy and an increasingly complex world. This mismatch was seen as a major factor behind the spread

of problems such as low employability, unemployment and social exclusion, which would also lead to a decrease in Europe's economic competitiveness (Walker, 2012). The rapid change in the demand for skills has been defined as a key feature of an even faster changing economy, labelled as post-industrial, knowledge-based and service-oriented. Thus, LLL and a workforce capable and willing to adapt to these demands become an economic necessity. The reform of European education and training systems is one result of this need for increased flexibility and was premised on a redefinition of education and learning by aligning education with economic needs (Rizvi, 2007).

Supported by the European Union (EU), LLL has emerged as a key theme of educational, welfare and labour market policies since the late 1990s. However, this accompanied a recurring ambiguity regarding the aims of LLL policy interventions: education for productivity, human capital and competitiveness on the one hand; education for broader personal development and social inclusion, reminiscent of maximalist positions, on the other (Holford and Mohorčič Špolar, 2012).

Human capital theory assumes that economic advantage and growth are directly linked to investment in human capital. From this perspective, individuals are seen as resources and education is associated with the enhancement of one's value on the labour market. Accordingly, the approach to LLL is strongly vocational (Ertl, 2006). The human capital approach therefore necessitates a reconceptualisation of the purpose of education itself. Overall, this approach remains anchored to a 'functionalistic' view of education as a means to update competences acquired in school, adapt to changing labour market needs and maintain the competitiveness of both individuals and economic systems.

However, the EU itself stressed that LLL has a range of non-economic justifications, stating that society and the economy would benefit from individuals' engagement in LLL (Walker, 2012). Combating exclusion and fostering personal fulfilment of European citizens, as well as promoting social cohesion and upward social mobility, have been listed as objectives when implementing LLL policies (Commission of the European Communities, 2000). Moreover, various authors have criticised the human-capital-centred understanding of LLL. Examining labour market outcomes, Livingstone (2012) challenges the problem definition and corresponding solutions underlying the dominant understanding of LLL by pointing to the high degree of overqualification, that is, the share of people with higher educational attainment than their job requires. According to Rizvi (2007), treating

education as a quantifiable asset within a competitive labour market might intensify the division between valuable and non-valuable people. As education would serve in this sense as means for social efficiency rather than social equity it is likely to have a negative impact on social cohesion and even widen social inequalities. Furthermore, the focus on human capital is premised on a problematic understanding of citizenship, emphasising the economic and neglecting other human dimensions such as the social and political. According to Casey (2012), a different understanding of citizenship can be envisioned starting from a broader, 'holistic' perspective of LLL. Meanwhile, Walker (2012) proposes not to abandon but to complement the human capital approach by placing greater focus on human capabilities. This approach – built upon Sen's broader capabilities understanding (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993) – maintains a recognition that education serves as a means to finding employment. More important, however, is education's role in promoting well-being and agency, fostering an emancipatory ideal through the enhancement of capabilities for participation, empowering both individuals and society. At present, the emancipatory potential of LLL is hindered by a current bias towards the economic function of LLL (Biesta and Leary, 2012). In contrast, the capabilities approach recognises diversity in people's abilities and the outcomes achieved by employing these abilities, including, but not restricting, these achievements to the domain of employment. Advocates of a wider and holistic perspective of LLL critique a narrow, functionalistic approach by connecting concerns about human capital, agency and well-being. In their view, a broader approach would shift the focus from education for economic means to education as means for human development, framing this as an end in itself.

A paradigmatic shift in social policies or just new rhetoric? The SI perspective

SI emerged at the end of the 1990s as a policy perspective supporting the relevance of the welfare state in employing public resources to foster productive social policies, combining social inclusion and economic competitiveness (Jenson, 2010). The origins of SI can be traced back to debates surrounding the relationship between the economy and the welfare state (Giddens, 1998; Esping-Andersen et al, 2002), as well as the place of education as a relevant dimension in comparative welfare analysis. The term 'social investment' was formally adopted in 2013 with the 'Social Investment Package' (EC, 2013), a political and policy platform set up by the Directorate General for Employment,

Social Affairs and Inclusion to steer social policy reforms in member states (Sabato, 2016).

Moving away from neoliberal approaches, SI advocates view welfare state policies as 'active' and 'productive' rather than 'passive' and understood as a 'cost'. SI contributions refer to a positive theory of the state; simultaneously assuming a redistributive function by providing social protection to citizens in need, as well as an empowering function through services that promote individual skills and human capital, activation, work–life balance and smooth transitions. The principle aim is to increase participation in the labour market, especially in high-quality jobs: SI can be understood as policy investment in tomorrow's tax payers as future productive workers (Hemerijck, 2017). Nonetheless, the activation approach should not be seen as a substitute for conventional income guarantees, as the minimisation of poverty and income security are preconditions for effective SI (Esping-Andersen et al, 2002).

The ambitious goals of SI are best supported by a comprehensive policy mix, broadly encompassing education policies, labour market policies, poverty alleviation policies and family policies. Interventions follow three analytically distinctive and complementary policy functions (Hemerijck et al, 2016):

- easing the *flow* of contemporary labour market and life course transitions;
- raising the quality of the *stock* of human capital and capabilities;
- maintaining strong minimum-income universal safety nets, as social protection *buffers* in ageing societies.

Hemerijck puts forward an argument of functional complementarities (further developed in section 'The devil in the detail: The complementarities of SI'), suggesting that the more these policies are aligned to a common goal and complement each other in a multiplicity of areas, the better returns they are able to provide. Such an argument stresses the relevance of institutional complementarities and synergies among policy interventions as necessary conditions for an effective SI strategy. A comprehensive SI strategy would involve increasing resources devoted to welfare policies in order to foster protection and promotion, competitiveness and inclusion (Morel et al, 2012). If resources remain constant or decrease, a trade-off occurs, undermining the expected positive outcomes of SI policies. SI strategy has rarely been related to the economic cycle, an oversight given that during crisis years budget cuts undermine investment in social policies. In this regard, Barbier

(2017) envisages two ways of implementing SI principles. The first has its roots in neoliberal economics, stressing the unsustainability of welfare provision and the risks of welfare dependency. Here, SI policies are governed by a functionalist view of education subject to market logics, substituting social protection with activation policies aimed at forcefully reintegrating people into the labour market. This 'functionalistic' understanding of SI contrasts with a second and more comprehensive and 'holistic' view, aimed at combining traditional social policy protection and SI promotion in order to increase participation and self-realisation as well as employment. Such contrasting approaches can be traced back to the lack of a common intellectual origin for this policy perspective (Morel et al, 2012), which was nurtured both by contributions from social democratic academics (Esping-Andersen et al, 2002) inspired by the example of the Nordic welfare states; and Third Way intellectuals and policy makers representing an Anglo-liberal view of social policy (Giddens, 1998). According to the Third Way, inequalities produce dynamism in the economy, and welfare state restructuring should imply a shift from traditional social protection to active policies fostering human capital development. Social democratic academics meanwhile consider the reduction of inequalities to be an explicit aim of SI necessary for economic efficiency. Furthermore, they state that the new welfare state architecture should be based on both an 'investment strategy' and a 'protection strategy' (Vandenbroucke and Vleminckx, 2011).

The SI perspective has also been widely debated and criticised in other ways. SI interventions are said to have ambiguous outcomes for inequalities and poverty trends (Nolan, 2013; Cantillon and Vandenbroucke, 2014): Bonoli and colleagues (2017) argue that human capital investments in childcare and higher education, as well as active labour market policies, are often biased by 'Matthew effects' – where measures designed to favour disadvantaged people have the opposite outcome. For instance, job-related training may require a proficient command of the local language and some cognitive or non-cognitive skills. The most disadvantaged might lack this knowledge and the required skills, thereby reinforcing their disadvantage. Other authors argue that the impact of SI cannot be taken for granted without considering the interplay between the socioeconomic and institutional contexts, which influences the outcomes of interventions: we can speak of contextual and institutional complementarities as key factors explaining restricted opportunities for developing SI policies and their limited impact in countries such as Italy (Kazepov and Ranci, 2016, 2017).

SI can be viewed as a paradigmatic change in the field of social policies, supporting policy interventions that focus more on prevention than on protection. Education and training policies represent the core of a policy mix that aims to prepare individuals for the uncertain landscape of social risks affecting contemporary societies, rather than providing reparatory compensation when the risks occur. This understanding of education represents the main connecting element between SI and LLL. Thus, the two concepts are placed in relation to one another and the ground is laid for analytical cross-contamination.

Considering education policies as part of welfare policies has significant consequences from an analytical point of view, in particular in the field of comparative research on welfare states. As stated by Wilensky (1975: 3): 'education is special'. While social policies are directly redistributive, thus affecting equality of outcomes, education is not directly redistributive, following a different principle of social justice: equality of opportunity. As it is conditioned by occupational structures and influenced by social background, investing in education can produce differentiated outcomes in terms of inequality and labour market participation (Checchi et al, 2014). Accordingly, comparative studies on social policies have often neglected education policies when analysing welfare state interventions (Busemeyer and Nikolai, 2010).

In the SI debate and literature, LLL is usually considered as part of investment strategies involving various policy fields. However, due to the similar constitutive tensions in their guiding principles, LLL is unable to resolve the ambiguities of the SI approach as these are inherent in social policies which oscillate between control and empowerment. The aforementioned tensions between human capital and social inclusion, efficiency and equity, therefore need to be disentangled by moving from the ideational principles to the implementation of SI and LLL policies. We believe that this can be done through the concept of institutional complementarities, stressing the synergies between policy interventions and contexts (Hemerijck, 2017; Kazepov and Ranci, 2017).

The devil in the detail: the complementarities of SI

The SI approach considers welfare policies as a productive factor connecting social inclusion and economic growth, designed to ease life course transitions through institutional complementarities and *synergic policy mixes*. In this section we elaborate on this distinctive characteristic of SI, highlighting shortcomings and risks that hamper the adoption of SI interventions and policy mixes in different contexts.

Institutional complementarities (Gagliardi, 2014) are crucial when addressing the assumptions underlying the SI perspective and its policy developments. The term gained momentum in the early 2000s, being widely used in the historical and comparative institutional analyses of capitalism (Hall and Soskice, 2001). This literature used the concept within a political economy framework, in order to explain persistently different institutional arrangements, implying that institutions established at various levels of a system are context dependent, rather than invariably conditioned by strict efficiency considerations (Gagliardi, 2014). Accordingly, two institutions can be defined as complementary if the presence (or efficiency) of one increases the returns from (or efficiency) of the other (Hall and Soskice, 2001). The underlying assumption is that certain institutional forms, when jointly present, reinforce each other and contribute to improving the functioning, coherence or stability of specific institutional configurations (Amable, 2016). Complementarities deal with the interdependence and the effects of interaction among single elements/institutions within a more complex configuration. This *goodness of fit* triggers synergic effects where the functional performance of one institution is positively affected by the combination with other institutions, resulting in a quantitatively and qualitatively better outcome. Furthermore, this means that several combinations of complementary institutions might exist that can bring about a beneficial effect in terms of aggregate economic performance (levels of growth, employment, productivity) and/or deliver benefits to specific groups (Crouch et al, 2005). There is no *one-size-fits-all* practice; instead subsystems with specific characteristics work together to produce a certain result.

A high degree of complementarity is usually associated with the Fordist post–Second World War period (until the early 1970s), also corresponding with the Golden Age of the welfare state: during 'mid-century social compromise' industrialism, capitalism, liberalism and citizenship achieved a distinctive balance in Western Europe (Boyer and Saillard, 2005) that resulted in the expansion of the welfare state and the wide diffusion of well-being (Crouch, 1999; Amable, 2016). On a country-level scale, the concept can also be applied to comparative analyses of welfare and capitalism. By analysing the combinations among the state, the market and the family – considered as institutions aimed at addressing social risks by following specific principles of resource allocation – scholars identified several welfare regimes which developed over decades (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Arts and Gelissen, 2002). In the varieties of capitalism (VoC) literature, Hall

and Soskice (2001) described Germany as a typical case of coordinated market economies, stressing that German firms rely heavily on non-market relationships to coordinate their endeavours with other actors and to construct strategic competencies, in order to maintain competitiveness. Busemeyer and Trampusch (2012) also rely on the concept of complementarity to define a typology of skill formation systems, looking at the varying degree of firms' involvement and public commitment to vocational education and training (VET). Capsada-Munsech and colleagues (2018) classified the countries and FRs participating in the YOUNG_ADULLLT project according to this skill formation typology. As a result, Austria and Germany are classified under the collective regime, where the long-standing tradition in adult education and VET involves collaboration among firms, social partners and the state in vocational skills provision. Finland, Portugal, Bulgaria, Italy and Spain are seen as being part of the statist regime, where adult education and VET are state-funded and more institutionalised, with lower firm involvement. Finally, Croatia and Scotland are considered to be cases of liberal regimes, where vocational skills are mostly provided by on-the-job training in firms, with a generally low public commitment to VET and adult education. The authors also identify similarities across regimes. For instance, many countries do not exhibit a high level of internal coherence but are instead 'mid-spectrum' or 'mixed market economies' (Rhodes, 2005).

The concept of institutional complementarity should not be understood statically. In fact, institutional change represents a privileged perspective for understanding how social systems transform themselves through changing balances among institutions. Processes of policy change usually evolve incrementally within the limits of institutional configurations, rather than occurring during critical junctures of institutional development (Thelen, 2009). Nevertheless, system breakdowns and revolutions should not be excluded a priori. Moreover, incremental changes can also reach tipping points, instigating broader processes of change.

Starting from the mid-1970s, the changing landscape of social risks (Ranci, 2010) has placed the traditional configuration of social protection systems under pressure. During the 1980s and the 1990s European welfare states experienced complex reforms ranging from recalibration to retrenchment – at least rhetorically – towards a neoliberal turn (Ferrera, 2013). Social expenditure did not decline abruptly; however, the virtuous processes of positive institutional complementarities – which supported economic growth and the spread of wealth during the 1960s and 1970s – turned into *negative*

complementarities. This implied that the cumulative and interactive effect reinforced negative consequences, such as rising inequalities. Negative complementarities started to emerge from deep socioeconomic changes and new related social risks which increased pressure on mature welfare states. Institutional change and adaptations, however, tend to develop at a slower pace than social and economic changes. Streeck and colleagues (2016) argue that three trends have run in parallel since the 1970s throughout the family of rich capitalist democracies: declining growth, rising inequality of income and wealth and rising debt – public, private and total. These trends were mutually reinforcing: low growth contributed to inequality by intensifying the distributional conflict, while inequality dampened growth by curbing effective demand. This brought about a growing misalignment and desynchronisation between resources and needs, demands for protection and the adequacy of interventions (Kazepov, 2009).

To summarise, if we consider complementarities as a continuum, we have:

- the positive extreme of goodness of fit and mutually reinforcing institutions, as in the case of coordinated market economies and liberal economies described in the VoC literature (Hall and Soskice, 2001);
- the mid-spectrum position where institutional subsystems may not be well calibrated with one another (Rhodes, 2005);
- the negative extreme, produced by cumulative and reinforcing negative effects resulting from institutional interaction (Cefalo and Kazepov, 2018).

Developing this further, we might rephrase the definition of complementarity in negative terms as follows: two institutions are negatively complementary if the presence (or efficiency) of one decreases the returns (or efficiency) of the other, such that the functional performance of one institution is negatively affected by the presence and functioning of another institution. The same applies to what we have termed contextual complementarities, namely the interactive and relational nature of the elements of a context, within which more formalised institutions operate and relate to one another. As a further example of negative complementarities, Kazepov (2009) highlights the desynchronised character of reforms to unemployment benefits and social assistance in Italy. Their occurrence at distinct moments within the last 20 years and their treatment as unrelated policy areas produced two major consequences. First, it created institutional interstices such

that for a considerable period of time those exiting unemployment benefits were not covered by social assistance schemes. Second – in particular due the lack of national coordination – this created a strong territorial fragmentation of the instruments tackling unemployment and poverty, increasing territorial inequalities.

According to Hemerijck (2017), an SI strategy must comprehensively rely upon institutional complementarities and policy synergies across policy measures, thus creating a virtuous circle helping to ease life course transitions. The measure Du Kannst Was, implemented in the FR of Upper Austria and analysed within the YOUNG_ADULLLT project (Cefalo et al, 2018), can be considered an example of complementarities enforced through policies. The measure is intended to facilitate official recognition of informally acquired professional skills. Its target group are young people over 22, who possess professional experience but lack good educational qualifications. The policy is based on a partnership involving a wide array of actors with different responsibilities and operating at various scales, including social partners and the economic chambers, the federal Ministry of Education, the regional state, public employment services and adult education institutions such as the Forum for Adult Education. Du Kannst Was was considered successful in preventing unemployment as it was subsequently adopted by other Austrian regional states. The experts and operators interviewed, as well as the young people involved, expressed largely positive evaluations of the policy implementation, stressing the importance of the intense and constructive model of cooperation developed by the actors, resulting from a high degree of complementarity among them.

The goodness of fit among institutions and across policy domains, however, cannot be taken for granted. On the one hand, we must consider that coherent policy reforms across different policy domains could be hampered by corporative interests exerting influence in particular policy fields. On the other hand, as previously mentioned, processes of institutional change may lead to new equilibria of resources and needs. We also need to consider the possibility that institutions negatively affect one another through desynchronisation and misalignment, thus creating vulnerabilities and disadvantages. In light of this, Kazepov and Ranci (2017) stress the necessity of analysing contextual preconditions structuring the interface among the labour market, welfare state and educational system. In fact, SI policies might have ambiguous and even unexpected negative impacts on both economic growth and equal opportunities when crucial contextual preconditions complementing policies are missing.

The positive returns of SI policy complementarities should not, therefore, be taken for granted. For most SI policies, positive returns are not anticipated in the short term: the SI approach aims at preparing the individual, thus translating the focus of policy interventions towards the future (Morel et al, 2012). Investments in human capital should foster high levels of quality and equality in educational and labour market outcomes later in life, thus helping to ease, together with adequate income protection, work and life transitions in times of uncertainty. For these very reasons, time also matters (Pierson, 2002), and the temporal dimension must be considered as paramount in this debate. This is due to the specific temporal horizon implied by SI reforms, especially in the field of educational and training policies. However, this makes it more difficult to evaluate the effects of policies, as many unpredictable and variable events might intervene between the initial investment and the following transitions. This is clearly shown in literature on the relationship between welfare and education, which stresses the special status of educational policies compared to more traditional interventions (Busemeyer and Nikolai, 2010). As an example, investment in education may ultimately result in increased inequalities over time (Checchi et al, 2014). For these very reasons, the temporal gap between the adoption and implementation of educational measures and their impact in terms of both labour market and social participation may bring about a desynchronisation among needs, expectations and returns. Temporal gaps might also influence negative complementarities and produce various forms of mismatch, for example, as expressed by gaps in employment rates and earnings between less and more educated individuals (Kazepov and Ranci, 2017).

Such an argument reframes the role of LLL policies within a SI perspective, stressing the relevance of policies aimed at supporting the development of individuals over their lifetime, thus not limiting them to a particular stage in the life course. Given the fact that LLL policies specifically address the temporal and life course dimension, they can potentially mediate between investments and expected returns. A well-suited LLL strategy may in fact rebalance the temporal bias produced by the difficulty in coordinating policy domains, and the medium- to long-term future horizon characteristic of investment policies. By contributing to the realignment and synchronisation of SI policies, LLL may thus enforce investment-related institutional complementarities in the long run and contribute to effectively realising the life course multiplier effect advocated within SI-related research contributions (Hemerijck, 2017).

Conclusions

Despite LLL policies being recognised as part of an SI strategy (Hemerijck et al, 2016), their role and relationship has not hitherto been addressed and analysed from a theoretical standpoint. In this chapter we have outlined the origins and development of LLL and SI. We have highlighted how both debates and discourses present ambiguities and competing interpretations that tend to polarise between a narrow and 'functionalistic' interpretation, with a clear focus on human capital and employability on the labour market, and a more 'holistic' and widely conceived approach emphasising capabilities, citizenship and personal development.

However, the commonalities we have identified create space for new empirical investigations into how different versions of SI and LLL interact within national and local contexts where citizens and policies meet. A particularly fruitful lens through which we might look at this relationship would address the contextual and institutional complementarities within which both unfold (Cefalo and Kazepov, 2018). This is true especially in the transitions shaping young people's life course, as they represent critical junctures that may have consequences at later stages of young people's lives. LLL measures, as already shown by the Du Kannst Was example (Cefalo et al, 2018), carry the potential to ease transitions, ensuring that contemporary coherent (social) investments in LLL are actually aimed at solving potential future problems. This would reduce the resources needed for more traditional, passive measures of social protection as potential damages are addressed ex ante and not only ex post, connecting the individual life course to the collective well-being.

The concept of institutional and contextual complementarities could create a bridge between SI and LLL. From this perspective, the relationship between SI and LLL can be conceptualised by connecting a life course approach with a focus on the political economy of skills and the governance of policy interventions and associated actors. These same perspectives also represent the crucial theoretical underpinnings of the YOUNG_ADULLLT project. Since the devil of SI lies in the detail of institutional and contextual complementarities, we argue that investment-related policies and LLL policies are potentially highly compatible within a broader SI strategy, with LLL specifically addressing the time dimension and the life course perspective that remains an underestimated feature of SI. When examining the empirical evidence produced by the YOUNG_ADULLLT project (Capsada-Munsech et al, 2018), such a virtuous level of deep coordination appears to be

rarely achieved, with an overall lack of coordinated policy-making regarding measures aimed at young adults observed in the participating countries. However, the analysis also shown high degrees of interaction and complementarities among actors involved in LLL policies within particular local contexts. For instance, this was the case for the measure of educational and labour market policies targeting school-to-work transitions in the FR of south-west Finland (Tikkanen et al, 2017). We suggest that further research should empirically investigate and assess the complementarity of SI and LLL policies within different national contexts, considering the multilevel governance arrangements that increasingly characterise most (European) countries.

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PART II

Lifelong learning supporting young adults

Young adults as a target group of lifelong learning policies

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Introduction

The first section of the chapter accounts for the processes that link lifelong learning (LLL) policies with a particular age group such as young adults, arguing that policies construct their target groups in various ways. The main stakeholders coordinate their actions by sharing a rationale or a 'theory of change' (at least, an array of factual claims as to the expected effects) of each policy. These varying institutional designs impinge on the experiences of young people in differing ways.

The second and the third sections analyse the views of professionals and young adults. The data are compared across member states and regions by examining whether or not apprenticeship schemes constitute the core of LLL policies. This exercise aims at highlighting some variations in how LLL policies navigate between learning and the economy. These analyses form the basis for our final discussion and conclusion.

This chapter analyses of interviews with young adults and experts, although our analysis requires greater focus on details regarding target groups. In Austria, Finland, Germany and Scotland a significant proportion of young people complete apprenticeships either after or during secondary education. In these countries, samples included LLL programmes catering to the needs of groups who cannot access apprenticeships. Significant dimensions of social vulnerability that constrained these young adults were socioeconomic exclusion, mental ill health, family abuse and refugee status. In Germany, each programme is addressed to specific groups, such as discouraged apprentices or very young mothers. In the other countries, LLL programmes respond to a wider variety of circumstances. In these cases, the whole social category of 'youth' is considered to be exposed to some form of social vulnerability. In Portugal and Spain, early school leaving exposes many young people to severe risks, but it was perceived as a normal pathway

towards employment prior to the financial crisis. In all five of these countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Portugal and Spain), at least some interviewees described their family's socioeconomic background as middle class.

Constructing target groups in the midst of policy borrowing and transfer

In order to facilitate our analysis, this chapter compares the objective of LLL policies, the chosen approach or 'theory of change', the definition of the target group(s) and the experience of young adults for two (roughly defined) types of LLL policies. On the one hand, Austria, Germany, Finland and Scotland have established complex arrangements of guidance, pre-vocational training, social benefits and vocational education around a core of institutionalised apprenticeship and on-the-job training schemes. The arrangements are relatively diverse but the consistency of institutionalisation is remarkable in all these countries (Walther, 2017). In contrast, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Portugal and Spain currently borrow the bulk of these policies from models developed elsewhere. In Italy, Portugal and Spain, vocational training has been in place for decades, but policies have seldom further developed those complex arrangements. In Bulgaria and Croatia, the majority of such policies have only recently been implemented.

The analysis explores the cultural political economy (CPE) of LLL policies in relation to discourses on public policies, which normally focus on a target group (Fairclough, 2003). This issue is explored within the framework of European governance, given that discourses are a crucial instrument of coordination (Radaelli et al, 2013). Finally, further research questions regarding the governance of youth transitions (Walther, 2017) as well as the experiences of the people who live through these transitions (Walther et al, 2015) are discussed from a life course research (LCR) perspective.

Policy makers engage in discursive activity to construct target groups and recognise the salient social categories for a policy. When professionals construct and pursue the objectives and the 'theory of change' of a given policy, they normally enact particular social categories to which the beneficiaries supposedly belong. Significantly, the same policies do not always understand given categories in the same way, nor do the beneficiaries usually perceive themselves through the lens of the relevant categories of a given policy.

The official European Union (EU) policy on early school leaving clearly follows an encompassing 'theory of change'. The European

Commission (EC) and the Council assume that the national rate will eventually decrease if member states engage in prevention, intervention and compensation (European Council, 2011). Similarly, the EC has recently launched a large initiative addressed to young people who have already completed compulsory education, the Youth Guarantee Scheme (YGS). The YGS assumes that jobs, training, activation, partnerships and other complementary measures will eventually reduce the figures of NEET (neither in employment nor in education and training) youth (European Council, 2013). These causal narratives enact social categories related to disadvantage (Walther, 2017), unemployment (McDonald and Marston, 2005; Caswell et al, 2010) and social inclusion (Thompson, 2011). Young adults live out these circumstances in different ways, to which they attribute different meanings.

But the understanding of LLL and the YGS is likely to vary according to the transition regimes of member states. Although it is hard to classify Central and Eastern European countries such as Bulgaria and Croatia, in other cases it is much easier to portray some general views of professionals. Thus, universalistic welfare regimes such as Finland normally relate disadvantage to individual rights. Liberal regimes identify disadvantage with poor employability, although Scottish policy-making is currently elaborating a more sophisticated version of this institutional mould. Conservative regimes such as Austria and Germany normally attribute disadvantage to lack of education. Finally, in Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Portugal and Spain youths normally rely on family support until they create their own family at a relatively late age. In these countries, LLL policy makers and professionals often assume that most young adults are somehow exposed to social disadvantage (Walther, 2017).

In this vein, the YGS assumes that the beneficiaries should change their routine in order to improve their participation in either education, training or the labour market. The social category of 'non-participants' forms a seemingly universal target group; however, this group is also diverse in terms of class, gender, ethnicity and other social attributes. Therefore, such assumed heterogeneity may inspire ungrounded expectations as to the impact of caseworkers' interventions (Thompson, 2011). Interestingly, not only does engaging with education, training or employment entail many specific challenges, but this very engagement may be quite different for young men and women coming from middle- and low-income backgrounds, as well as from different family trajectories of migration and location, in countries such as Bulgaria, Finland, Germany and Portugal.

The analysis of governance focuses on interactions between policy actors. The EC is in charge of monitoring the implementation of the YGS, allocating funds and evaluating the final impact. The European Council (2013) directly asked the governments of member states to comply with the YGS, although regional and local authorities also play an important role in the majority of states. In a nutshell, this web of responsibilities instantiates the phenomenon of policy borrowing and transfer (Steiner-Khamsi and Waldow, 2012), whereby decision makers set policy objectives and look for inspiring standard models. While, in the 20th century, policy makers often found key ideas within their own national traditions, since the turn of the millennium they have frequently borrowed many guidelines from elsewhere. Some countries and a few well-resourced and well-connected international organisations (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Bank) have been the main promoters of policy borrowing. In fact, the EU is essentially reproducing these processes within its own governance system.

A remarkable finding of previous research on policy borrowing and transfer highlights how context is normally as influential as content (Steiner-Kheimer and Waldow, 2012). The reasons why a foreign example is perceived as interesting in a given country at a certain time do not only lie in scientific evidence or rational calculation. Frequently, governments adopt a foreign approach in the name of priorities and needs that seldom relate to the original context.

Thus, the YGS has triggered a typical process of European governance. To begin, the Council and the Commission recommend policies to the member states. Then, the Commission develops a causal narrative or a 'theory of change', that is to say, a systematic body of causal beliefs that predict how the policy is going to produce effective changes in a certain area. In general, European member states often draw on these narratives to endorse better regulation (Radaelli et al, 2013). Ultimately, it is designers of LLL policies at the regional level – street-level professionals who deliver services to young people, consultants that provide support and young adult beneficiaries – who engage in this complex web of discursive activity.

The next section applies these insights on the CPE and governance to the evidence produced from interviews with experts in 18 regions spanning nine countries, highlighting a correlative variation between 'theories of change' and notions of target groups.

LCR has widely documented the extent to which LLL policies take into account the living conditions, family responsibilities and civil

engagement of young adults. So far, this theoretical perspective has illuminated three substantial findings that shed light on the situation of young adults who participate in LLL policies. First, although the pathways of youth transitions are embedded in daily routines, young people also use their judgement to qualify, review and elaborate these pathways (Biesta and Tedder, 2007). For instance, LCR researchers have noticed that youths opt for smooth academic and vocational pathways. Although many apparently follow the recommendations of their teachers and school counsellors, a large group does not agree on the reasons with which those professionals attempted to persuade them. There is no clear correlation between compliance and enrolling in higher education (Walther et al, 2015). Second, young people also draw on complex accounts of how their families facilitate social capital or need support. Family relationships mould senses of belonging that eventually influence decision-making on further education (Butler and Muir, 2016). Third, consequently, the perspectives of professionals do not normally match perfectly with the perspectives of youth. European and national authorities craft official discourses that professionals translate into terms of everyday experiences. For instance, although universalistic regimes provide encompassing guarantees, beneficiaries often state that they are not receiving any support. Conservative regimes illustrate another example of divergent perspectives to the extent that many interviewees regret how counsellors required them to change their aspirations so that they became realistic and fitted with the available opportunities more easily (Walther, 2017).

The following section explores how youth become targets of LLL policies and presents an LCR analysis of interviews with young adults who participate in these policies in the countries under study. In essence, these interviews show young people's disparate explorations of vulnerability, previous painful experiences and opportunities to overcome vulnerability through employment, education and vocational training.

The official definition of target groups

Policy design normally draws on socio-demographic indicators in order to establish who will be the target of a measure. Thus, decision makers ultimately come to define certain groups (either directly or indirectly) in terms of age, education, sex, immigration status and/ or other available statistical indicators. On the other hand, people use social categories to distinguish groups and identify themselves as members of (as well as outliers or alien to) certain groups. As a result,

the official definition of any policy target inevitably intermingles with intricate social interactions.

Unsurprisingly, not only the design of the YGS but also its implementation, monitoring and evaluation entail dilemmas at national and subnational levels. These endeavours question issues that stakeholders easily take for granted in everyday life. Who are young people? Why do they need a guarantee? How is the scheme going to work? These certainly complex dilemmas become even more complex due to the predicaments of governance. Stakeholders in LLL and YGS policies eventually associate the previous questions regarding the context of policies with other questions concerning governance. Is the YGS necessary in the same way everywhere? Who is in charge? How does LLL integrate previous policies? How is the YGS to be adapted to varying national contexts?

In this section, we will highlight how stakeholders answer the second set of questions in diverse ways and how these answers convey different portraits of target groups.

In Austria, Finland, Germany and Scotland expert interviewees drew on a comprehensive 'theory of change' that linked the antecedents, objectives, expected impacts and evaluation strategies of LLL policies connected with the YGS. Interestingly, this similarity has led us to cluster together quite different institutional arrangements within our discussion. That is to say, while Austria and Germany have developed some of the best-known differentiated systems of LLL policy, Finland and Scotland do not follow the same model. In addition, this clustering is not intended to suggest that the authorities of these countries agree on what LLL policies are. Particularly in Scotland, experts understood the expression 'TVET [technical and vocational education and training] policies' as making reference to a clear corpus of goals and guidelines, while deeming the notion of 'LLL policies' too vague for rigorous discussion.

A central concern of Austrian interviewees was providing young people with initial on-the-job experience. In their view, although specific social benefits cater to the needs of youth who suffer from the risks of social vulnerability, these benefits do not equip them with the skills they need to succeed in employment and construct their professional identity in the medium term. One expert expressed this very clearly by claiming that an effort to 'place people concretely in employment' was a necessary movement 'away from the theoretical' (E_AT_V_1).

In Finland, authorities frame the YGS within a 'public–private–people partnership' (MOE-Finland, 2012). Besides arrangements

between public agencies and private providers, the responses of experts paid close attention to the 'people' in the two regions that were included in the sample, all the more relevant due the heterogeneity of these regions. South–west Finland is a thriving urban area whilst Kainuu is a remote rural region. In both areas, experts coincided to require that these programmes took 'people' into account. For some, it was important to acknowledge that 'everyone has difficulties in admitting their own problems and challenges in life' (E_FI_SF_2). Others emphasised that 'here the young person has an opportunity to think' (E_FI_K_3). These comments are quite coherent with a further claim, namely that participation is an essential objective,

> and the third essential objective is tied to one of our themes, which is youth participation, in that young people are involved in developing this operation. (E_F_SWF_4)

In Germany, the expert interviewees relied on an informal 'theory of change'. In Frankfurt, they argued that LLL policies constitute an institutional system, which, in their view, means a set of different measures catering to different needs, while the baseline consists of equipping the most vulnerable youth with basic skills. In addition, a further set of compensatory programmes was to equip the beneficiaries with more elaborate instruments so that empowerment and qualification foster their employability ('On the one hand of course, the women get an official apprenticeship and become financially independent from the welfare office and from their husbands. So they can live their lives independently from any other factors. That is the primary goal. The next goal is that they grow personally', E_GER_F_2). In Bremen, interviewees said that each policy tackles different needs, and ultimately, employability is the cornerstone of the system. The main policies in this region are designed to address youth unemployment and dropout rates, as students are prepared for an apprenticeship and 'are taught certain competences like structured work, punctuality, how to keep files tidy, in general, we give them a structure or a goal' (E_GER_B_1).

Scottish authorities label their 'theory of change' using an expressive metaphor. The Employability Pipeline maps out a series of actions that allegedly underpin the work readiness, skills and employability of beneficiaries. Both authorities and professionals expect that five types of action will push the beneficiaries of vocational training, social benefits, vocational education and career guidance from exclusion to regular employment. These types of action are engagement,

needs assessment, vocational activity, employers' assessment and in-work support (MoET-Scotland, 2013). In the interviews, some experts claimed that engagement and vocational activities presented role models to youth. They stressed that young adults 'are looking everywhere for role models. They've just got to try and pick the right role model and they (will want) to achieve' (E_UK_A_5).

In Italy, Portugal and Spain, most experts did not mobilise the type of elaborate arguments presented in the previous paragraphs. At most, some of them expressed vague causal beliefs in the beneficial effects of psychological support. This is not a minor contribution, since they are struggling with different bureaucratic traditions that have reduced LLL and active labour market policies to providing short-term training courses:

> The truth is that it is very procedural, it has become a very controlling programme and currently the technicians spend more time on administrative issues, of control, managing, documenting, signatures, bureaucracy, than on the youngster, sincerely. (E_SP_G_11)

But the evidence does not indicate that authorities associate the YGS with a general 'theory of change', although this is only a provisional conclusion that should not overlook possible exceptions. For instance, in Portugal Vale do Ave LLL policies respond to an implicit but coherent rationale:

> The execution is based on an action plan developed by the Executive Committee of the Local Council for Social Action (CLAS) with regard to the Plan for Social Development. A commission of inter-municipal representatives elaborates the Plan, which the CLAS validates afterwards. (E_PT_VdA_2)

Nonetheless, the national analyses did not spell out a general approach that posited a framework for everybody's opinions. Additionally, it is remarkable that some interviewees highlighted the deficits – according to their view – of the beneficiaries:

> There is no way to make them understand that … they're a bit spoiled, they give me the impression of being a bit spoiled, a bit empty …, they do not have significant interests or hobbies, even when you ask them what they do in the afternoon, if they do a sporting activity, if they

have something to do, a passion … no, no they tend to see friends and nothing else. They live on a low socio–cultural level and actually they are not stimulated at home, in any direction … (E_IT_M_6)

This is not to deny that low motivation or inappropriate language may become a hurdle for many youngsters, nor that the target group is necessarily heterogeneous in these countries. Regardless of their specific validity for a programme in a certain region, the general use of these observations suggests that the rationale of LLL policies assumes a stereotype. If the main area of professional action focuses on correcting low motivation and inappropriate language and distributing varied groups among providers, it suggests that stakeholders share the belief that the main factors of social exclusion lie somewhere inside the psyche of youth:

> Now we always do prep sessions. I do prep sessions where I not only tell them what behaviour they should have, what is expected of them. The type of language, what … is the language they use, the language they cannot use with each other, when we are talking about how they greet the intern tutor or how they greet fellow interns, how they behave in the workplace, receiving orders with humility and simplicity, these are always things I ask them to be careful about, not using their mobile phone, because it is always a temptation, the kind of clothing they take to the workplace. This type of advice is important not only for the internship but also for the future when they are working. (E_PT_AL_4)

In Bulgaria and Croatia experts mostly kept within official guidelines for the interview schedule. In these countries, authorities define standard LLL policies and require professionals to implement the same guidelines everywhere:

> Well, I think the authorities and all those involved in the making of those decisions should be more led by praxis and what happens 'in real life'. There is a difference between making decisions with no relation to praxis, when everything is on a theoretical level and things look great, but when it comes to actual praxis, things turn out to be completely different. (E_CRO_OB_2)

Some of them also attributed stereotypes to the beneficiaries of LLL policies. Although authorities expect that all youngsters undertake LLL, expert interviewees considered that some groups posed greater problems; indeed, some of them regarded beneficiaries as being at the lowest ranks of a polarised social hierarchy:

> Conflicts arise between the two communities because one is accustomed to living in one way, the other – in another way. There is some intolerance … Just someone feels discriminated against by something, for example, when a Bulgarian has to queue with 50 people from ethnic minorities. (E_BG_P_5)

Becoming the target of a LLL policy

Young adults are not passive recipients of LLL policies that deploy the YGS across the nine countries analysed in this chapter. On the contrary, although some (mostly the youngest among them) express how hard it is to build a future trajectory in extremely uncertain circumstances, others are quite assertive of their life projects and openly criticise the constraints they face.

This section presents a general overview of their responses, which identifies a number of core themes. The interpretation of their current position and the memory of previous painful experiences are important issues in all the countries. In addition, interviewees introduced key national and regional nuances when discussing ways to escape social vulnerability through employment, education and vocational training. Thus, five issues structure this section: young people's position, their scars, their available employment opportunities, their views on education and their use of vocational training.

First, many young adults expressed fear that their current position in the labour market and the education and training systems lead to a dead end. They defined this anxiety as a sharp emotion that imprinted a sort of psychological scar.

Highlighting the social contradictions of youth policies was a straightforward way to raise the point:

> Well it is a social, a social descent, if you're just not part of, of the norm–society, I would call it. But that you're one of those, that, you hear and read of them, yes, the Austrian unemployed youth. That's the box, in which you are put automatically. (Y_AT_V_6)

> Because at the end of the day I find myself young, because you do not know what criteria, therefore 'trainee', exploitable until … but at the same time too qualified for a salaried job, so I still have a degree, a degree, different experiences behind me and so on, so … that is, a situation from which it is not easy to extricate oneself. (Y_IT_G_1)

Rejection of continuous requirements to present one's life project to teachers, counsellors and employers also conveyed some of these emotions: 'This communication with the counsellor has become like some formality for me …' (Y_CRO_OB_3).

Stigma was also a concern. Certainly, vulnerability provoked intense emotions of despair and shame:

> Now I am a little bit ashamed to submit my CV because it has been torn, torn, torn with these (LLL) programs […] I did not imagine my career like this or at least I did not want it. It's like a history, I cannot hide it. (Y_BG_P_5)

Gender and migration are deeper issues that this section can only grasp superficially; a more rigorous account would require thicker descriptions of each research setting.

Nonetheless, we can tentatively highlight some gendered experiences. For example, the interviewees observed that employment and training opportunities for low-skilled workers posit very different role expectations to males and females:

> our guidance counsellor said to me that now you will go to the [study programme] cause you're a girl, but like I would have wanted to study something related to cars, like auto mechanics, but yeah, that idea didn't suit our guidance counsellor who said, like, it's only for boys. (Y_FI_SF_7)

Albeit in a cursory way, a further point on migration completes the range of references to the scars of vulnerability. In both South-Eastern and Western Europe, some young adults mentioned the option to leave the country as a thought that relieved them from their current negative feelings regarding their social position:

> My task in 10 years is to bring my mother and my sister together with me and move to the USA, where my friends

are waiting for me, also assuring me a job, this is my task! (Y_IT_M_4)

I gave Croatia a deadline. If I am not able to find a job in Croatia before the end of the year, I will move abroad. My years are passing by, and I am unable to plan anything in my life. (Y_CRO_OB_4)

Second, for some young adults, it was hard to share certain previous painful experiences with uncaring parents, including chronic disease and mental health problems:

that I as a human being, as an adult am allowed to live and learn and that I as an affected person [by a chronic disease], I am allowed to work, that I can be normal despite my problems, that I have my place in normal society. (Y_GER_F_1)

In Girona (Spain), rent has escalated since 2013 and many interviewees had squatted in abandoned dwellings left empty after the 2008 financial crisis. This type of deprivation was also a factor in producing anxiety:

How do you see yourself in ten years' time? Buf. Look. Now I have a child. I see myself with two children and a mortgage. I am struggling to get a mortgage. So far I have lived as a squatter. When the court gives its final judgement, probably I will have to deliver the keys. Because now I am not at-risk of housing exclusion as I used to be. Now I have my payroll, my income. I have to look for a mortgage. (Y_SP_G_10)

School bullying was a biographical hallmark for many interviewees. Although it is hard to delve into this issue on the grounds of the memories of 20 year olds, a wide array of quotations document to what extent this experience impinged on their lives:

Yes [bullying affected my choices]. And they were not good choices. There was for example this, there were many opportunities to accept help, but I didn't. Because umm I suppose I expected that it just wouldn't help anything. (Y_FI_K_7)

> I rebelled against my step-dad, but this was because I was younger and I didn't really understand the whole divorce, parents-splitting-up kind of thing. So I did a lot of rebelling against that. So when it came to school work, 'cause I was getting bullied in primary school, school work was put on the back burner a lot. I was like, I put up a big fuss about it. So I kind of blamed that on my step-dad. (Y_UK_A_2)

Particularly poignant dilemmas derived from the difficulties of immigrant youth to pursue further education because their previous diploma was not recognised in their host country:

> I would love to go on with my education. I finished my secondary school in my country. But here I am not allowed to go on. I don't like the adult school because they only teach my course three or four hours a week. It is not enough. (Y_SP_G_7)

Two autobiographical portraits complete this selection of evidence regarding problems that emerged during childhood. In Frankfurt, a young female reported how her biological parents mistreated her; continuously reminding her she was unwanted (Verlage, Boutiuc-Kaiser and Schaufler, 2017). Eventually she decided to break away and struggle to 'achieve something' on her own, which led her to LLL services.

In Girona, a young male remembered how he had suffered continuous bullying because of his weight. Since he lived in the same small town at the time of our conversation, he still met his harassers in the street. Although he had told his parents, and they complained to teachers, nothing was done. Eventually, the bullying aggravated his eating disorder (Rambla et al, 2017). Thus, secondary education presented very difficult changes due to both a stricter academic environment and such a violent everyday life. For him, the worst experience was waking up knowing he had to spend the whole day at school without doing anything productive. He felt relieved when his teachers recommended he started an initial vocational training outside the school focused on cooking, which he realised he loved.

Third, young adult interviewees struggled to overcome vulnerability by means of employment opportunities. The emphasis on this alternative varied depending on the country; while there was a strong emphasis on tertiary education in Austria, Finland, Germany and Scotland, a heterogeneous set of formal and informal alternatives

emerged in the rest of the countries (e.g. job promotion, social connections and entrepreneurship).

Although some interviewees relied on tertiary education across all the countries, these views were markedly more pronounced in Austria, Finland, Germany and Scotland:

> When I was an apprentice, it was not nice for me to be an apprentice. […] How shall I explain that, I believed that I could do more than that. […] How can I say that […] I *thought I could do better than that. […] I have always believed I can do better. […] And I proved that I can.* (Y_AT_UA_6; emphasis added)

Many young adult interviewees related tertiary education and social mobility. For instance, two Bulgarian young adults stated they wanted to find a stable job in the company where they were currently employed. Their plan was to reach a managerial position by improving their skills with some form of education and training while they were working. The key feature of interviewees from Bulgaria is that they were much more imprecise than others across the study. In a similar way to these two Bulgarians, one young man mapped out his future professional steps as a continuous upwards ladder (Kovacheva et al, 2017):

> When you get some experience as a software developer, you can create your own software and sell it. For instance, you develop something for a private school. Then, you earn some money for keeping it updated. But some families may also become interested in your services. I see some professionals got good positions … (Y_SP_G_8)

In Croatia, Italy and Portugal, some respondents argued that either firms or vocational training programmes made seemingly straightforward but untenable promises: managers recommended very unreliable 'stable' tracks, economic sectors spoiled the initial vocation of youth and programmes simply did not render real employment opportunities:

> It's like this: I've always really liked this area. […] In professional terms, working at this time on hospitality is very complicated. […] Because it is seasonal. To go to work in the Algarve in the summer is possible, but then they opt for

temporary companies. What do temporary companies have? The hotel has a team of 12 people, for example. When it has a larger flow of customers, it hires specific people by the hour, just for those days when it has the most activity and it's over. It's complicated. Then, to be working, a person has no life of her own. I'm 22 years old, I like to go out, to be with my friends, to socialise, it does not work. Because we only have a schedule for entering work, but there is no set time to leave. The person leaves, but she takes work home because she has to think about what she has to do for the next day. […] And it is exhausting. Then you only have one day off per week. It's complicated. (Y_PT_AL_8)

In Bulgaria, Croatia and Portugal, some young adults noticed the potential of social connections. In Croatia, an interviewee directly observed that political parties offered the best way to find jobs through influential acquaintances. In Bulgaria, a young woman reported how she had failed to find a teaching position through her father's network but had succeeded in finding a job in the telecom industry through her boyfriend's friends. In Portugal, an interviewee reported he had really learnt to be a hairdresser by cutting his friends' hair:

Yes, I started with my friends. The first time I cut hair it was for a friend. I was at home and I was like, 'Hey, let me cut your hair, you know?' 'Hey, man, go for it, I'll let you.' And there he was and there was another. And I cut his hair and the other one liked it and said, 'Oh, cut mine too.' It was the first time I cut hair. Then I started to cut more and said, 'Look, let me do this, let me do that.' (Y_PT_AL_8)

In Plovdiv and Girona, a couple of respondents referred to entrepreneurship. They suggested they would create their own business:

(I want) to have 50, 60, 70 acres and my business to go with it. That's when I call myself a boss, right? I want to develop my business and involve some serious traders, something to do with contracts, buy everything by contract […] [I plan] to make a warehouse, to have everything I need. (Y_BG_P_11)

Fourth, in Italy, Portugal and Spain young adults emphasised education as the way out of vulnerable situations. Completing secondary

education was a challenge for many of them, not least because of high early school leaving rates. Although in Spain guidance is normally reduced to single interviews, and most vocational training programmes are shorter than one year, in Girona a number of interviewees benefited from a two-year pilot career-guidance programme. Significantly, their main theme was overcoming vulnerability through education. It is interesting to notice that some middle-class interviewees basically addressed this issue in the same terms. Thus, one female respondent narrated how her parents had supported her up to her mid-twenties, when she was planning to take an official examination to become a civil servant for life.

In Italy and Portugal, many had observed that diplomas were indispensable when searching for a job:

> I've tried everything to find a job, applying online and delivering my CVs wherever, but they have always replied: 'Look, you're not our ideal profile.' Indeed, nearly all of them were searching for qualified people or, at least, workers with certified previous experiences, and I have a lot of experiences, but all of them are undeclared. […] Anyway, reaching the high school diploma is my thing, because it's something I do want … I have nothing to prove to anybody, but I do want to prove it to myself, I want to be sure that the skills I have are formally recognised by my graduation. (Y_IT_M_2)

> I started wondering: what will I do if this goes wrong? This is what I do, I can't do anything else. And so I talked to a few friends to see if they knew of some course I could do. I didn't know what I wanted to do, but I wanted to go back to school. And now I am finishing high school, to have some basis. (Y_PT_VdA_8)

Finally, some young adults expected to overcome vulnerability by means of the vocational training they were undertaking at the time of the interviews. In Austria and Germany, they spoke of both the advantages and the shortcomings of these programmes:

> It is really much better now, because I've got a task to fulfil. Because I think that a task is just, everyone needs a task and for me it is, it just is, I've also got a rhythm. […] I would say it is really good that I am here, because the

> people just support you. They talk stuff through with you. Also, personal stuff. […] I think it helps. But I think you have to engage in it. […] I think you can get really far, but you have to engage, to engage with the people, with the coaches. (Y_AT_UA_2)

> I have learned that I can come to them with every simple and trivial question and I get an answer. And I really found hope here and I have the feeling that I've got perspective. […] I have the feeling that here are human beings who really support special cases like me [laughs]. Yes, and it is the first time I feel safe. (Y_GER_F_1)

In Italy, Portugal and Spain, young adults mostly mentioned vocational training in very vague and generic terms. For instance, a 22-year-old man said he only visited the local employment centre when he received the periodic postcard asking him to go. In the views of these interviewees, a key strength of vocational training lies in a close relationship between trainers and students as well as among students themselves:

> I have administrative and accounting office skills, since having attended school (where I got excellent evaluations) I've learned everything I could [following her dropout] […] I've learned by myself, by doing undeclared tax return compilations for some friends. (Y_IT_M_3)

> So much companionship, then … the teachers, very close to us. It's not like a high school. I did the courses with less people, because we were ten per module, like they are closer to you, they help you more, you … They reinforce you more … I do not know, like that … You learn more, okay? In my opinion. (Y_SP_M_7)

In Bulgaria and Croatia, young adults at most had formal relations with vocational training officers. A young woman from Croatia stated she had 'no expectations whatsoever' when commenting on her counsellor (Bouillet, Pažur and Domović, 2017). In Bulgaria, a young graduate woman from a minority background was required to enrol in the YGS to get a job. Other young adults also reported they were put under pressure to join the scheme:

> I started looking for a new job […] When they saw that I was of such an age and I had the education, they

immediately made the link that they could use subsidized employment for me. They made me wait for the [Youth Employment] programme to open, I was appointed by this programme and only after that they offered me the place. (Y_BG_P_5)

As I decided to apply for the job, the boss mentioned that he had participated in this [LLL] programme […] And if I want to start with them, this is the condition because the programme actually requires it. […] I did not know about this programme before. And then I was impressed by the fact that a lot of the companies participate precisely because of the amount [paid] that helps them for the budget later on. (Y_BG_P_2)

Discussion and conclusion: constructing target groups through social interaction

The actors involved in LLL policies use discourses to construct target groups (CPE), but these discourses do not transmit the same meaning to all actors (governance). Young adults actively look for instruments that help them to be autonomous at certain moments of their life (LCR). Therefore, a standard approach such as the YGS leads to diverse policies once filtered through a variety of local contexts and multiple forms of implementation.

Across countries, the institutional design is not similarly comprehensive. Sometimes, where designs are sketchy, the professional portraits of target groups refer to the defects of beneficiaries.

- In Austria, Finland, Germany and Scotland, the YGS avails itself of a long institutional tradition of apprenticeships and recognised policy-making expertise in the area of LLL. Expert interviewees mostly mentioned young adults in quite official terms.
- In Italy, Portugal and Spain, the YGS entails policy borrowing. Authorities attempt to design LLL programmes that broaden a traditionally narrow focus on vocational training courses. In these countries, some expert interviewees voiced derogatory stereotypes of the beneficiaries.
- In Bulgaria and Croatia, the YGS has placed youth high on the policy-making agenda, but the authorities struggle to cope with these new requirements. In the interviews, street-level bureaucrats also engaged in stereotyping.

LLL policies targeted at young adults relate to employment, education and vocational training, with these foci acquiring variable meanings depending on the country.

- Employment-focused LLL policies are not suitable for tackling the experiences of some young adults who occupy an insecure social position and have previously suffered problems such as disease, mental ill health, family abuse or bullying at school.
- In Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Portugal and Spain, LLL policies targeted at young adults are producing a kind of compensatory effect. When employment opportunities are scarce and insecure, many youth react to their negative experiences in the labour market by upgrading their qualifications and academic diplomas.

Although the YGS recommends that authorities invite youngsters to participate in policy-making, this is not the case in most EU countries, and political participation remains low on the agenda – Finland being the only exception. In Austria and Germany, both experts and young adults occasionally touch on debates surrounding the strengths and weaknesses of LLL policies. However, in Italy, Portugal and Spain young people discuss these policies in very vague and generic terms. Room for participation is narrow in Bulgaria and Croatia. Therefore, it is not plausible to conclude that these policies support the capability of young adults to become autonomous agents of their own life plans.

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The effectiveness of lifelong learning policies on youth employment: do regional labour markets matter?

Queralt Capsada-Munsech and Oscar Valiente

Introduction

In a context of historical growth of youth unemployment rates due to the global financial crisis, most of the lifelong learning (LLL) policies adopted by national governments across Europe have been dominated by the employability agenda. The problem with this agenda is that it assumes that the main causes of youth unemployment are to be found in the education and training system and in the inadequate level of skills of young people, without questioning the economic and labour market policies that have led to the youth unemployment crisis. In this sense, LLL policies contribute to turn a structural economic problem into an individual one, usually of an educational nature (Biesta, 2006). These LLL policies construct their target groups as individuals with educational deficits or without the skills demanded by the labour market. Consequently, the policy solutions offered to these individuals are additional work-relevant education and training opportunities, preferably delivered through work-based learning modes of provision.

Most of the LLL policies analysed in this research can be classified into two main groups: apprenticeships and employability training courses. While apprenticeships aim at providing work-based learning to gain industry- and/or firm-relevant skills, employability courses aim at activating unemployed youth and preparing them for the demands of the world of work. In both cases, there is a strong focus on meeting the skills demanded by employers, which vary across regions due to their different labour market and socioeconomic configurations.

Education and training institutions, as well as most LLL policies, are designed and promoted at the national level. Nevertheless, their enactment and implementation takes place at the regional and/

or local level. Given the heterogeneity of socioeconomic contexts within countries, the effectiveness of these national policies is likely to be moderated by the regional labour markets and the employment opportunities available to young adults in each context. The aim of this chapter is to analyse and discuss to what extent the effectiveness of national LLL policies on youth employment varies across regions displaying different regional labour market demands and employment opportunities for young adults in vulnerable situations.

LLL policies and the employability debate

The notion of employability is highly contested and controversial both at a theoretical and political levels. Perhaps the most widely used definition of employability is the one that focuses on the ability of individuals to access a job, to retain this job, to move between different roles within the same organisation and to access new jobs (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). Under this definition, employability does not refer so much to the fact of being employed in a specific moment of time, but to the ability of individuals to be employed during the course of their professional careers.

   The theoretical approaches that have tried to put this concept into operation can be differentiated between those that focus on supply-side factors, and those that focus on demand-side factors (McQuaid et al, 2005). On the one hand, supply-focused theories place more emphasis on individual factors of employability, such as attitudes, transversal and transferable skills, qualifications and knowledge of the work environment, the ability to find a job, the adaptability and flexibility of the worker or the status of their health. On the other hand, demand-focused approaches pay more importance to social and labour market factors, the macroeconomic environment, the characteristics of the jobs, recruitment practices, support and guidance, and the effects of other social policies on the living conditions of young people (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005).

   Despite the complexity and nuances of academic debates around the notion of employability, most policy discourses have tended to adopt a very narrow version of the concept, placing all the emphasis on supply-side factors. Due to the 'supply-side fundamentalism' that dominates the policy discourses on employability (Peck and Theodore, 2000), the responsibility to improve the opportunities to be employed falls entirely on the education system and on the individual. Employability discourses tend to point out that the education system does not achieve the minimum levels of quality, that the curriculum is

too academic, that the skills which are acquired are not relevant for the labour market and that vocational schools and training centres should respond better to the needs of employers. This individualisation and educationalisation of youth unemployment is linked to a LLL policy agenda that promotes new institutional and governance arrangements in the vocational education and training (VET) system to increase the voice and the influence of employers and market mechanisms in the planning and provision of LLL (McGrath et al, 2010). These reforms tend to involve greater decision-making capacity of employers in governing bodies, the use of staff from companies in the training of young adults, less time for theoretical knowledge and more for practical skills in the curriculum, shorter training courses over formal education, and less hours of classroom education and more work-based learning forms of provision.

In this chapter, we go beyond the supply-side fundamentalism that has dominated political discourses in Europe when analysing the relationship between LLL policies and youth unemployment. Instead, we take into account both the supply and labour demand factors – as well as the interaction between them – when analysing the relationship between LLL and youth employment. The educational and training offered, the socioeconomic background of young adults and the labour market conditions are factors that should not be considered in isolation or as independent. Therefore, we need to understand how these factors influence each other in the educational, social and labour market contexts where young adults live and make their decisions.

Contextualisation and selection of cases

Comparative research on LLL policy has traditionally used the nation state as its primary unit of analysis, distinguishing different national institutional specificities, cultures, traditions and structures in spheres such as education and training or labour market organisation. This literature pointed to several dimensions along which countries vary in terms of institutional design, patterns of relationship between the public and private spheres, funding and support/guidance schemes. Comparative research from a range of disciplines has contributed vastly to coming to terms with this enormous complexity by designing classificatory and typological frameworks that help us to understand different systems as ideal-typical cases, thus yielding interesting insights into the central characteristics and peculiarities of their systems (Allmendinger, 1989; Shavit and Müller, 1998; Ashton et al, 2000; Greinert, 2004; Saar et al, 2013; Pilz, 2016).

Institutional political economy has tried to integrate the relationships among education, the labour market and economic factors in its classifications from an interdisciplinary perspective. Under this tradition, Busemeyer and Trampusch (2012) contributed with the most accomplished classification of skill formation systems in advanced economies. Taking the paradox of collective action among firms as the starting point (Crouch et al, 2001), they interrogate how institutional arrangements of skill formation facilitate the solution of collective action problems typical of unregulated training markets. They suggest two relevant dimensions of variation to understand the different solutions to these collective action problems in VET: the degree of firm involvement and the degree of public commitment. A higher involvement of firms in training might imply a higher specificity of training, and a higher commitment of the state will go beyond financial support and include the certification and standardisation of training, as well as the recognition of VET as a viable alternative to academic higher education. The combination of these two dimensions results in four types of solutions: (1) the liberal model of on-the-job-training (e.g. the UK); (2) the segmentalist model of firm's self-regulation (e.g. Japan); (3) the statist solution of state-run training (e.g. France); and (4) the collective solution where firms, employers' and workers' associations and the state collaborate in providing and financing skills (e.g. Germany).

We first use aggregate quantitative data at the national and regional levels (NUTS 2) to map countries and regions under study in the YOUNG_ADULLLT research project against the skill formation regimes framework, based on the degree of public commitment and firms' involvement in skill formation in VET.[1] We operationalise these two dimensions following previous research (Busemeyer and Iversen, 2012):

- *Public commitment to VET*: we multiply the national public spending in upper secondary education as a share of GDP (gross domestic product) (average 2012–15) with the share of students in upper secondary vocational education (2012) to provide a more refined and proportional measurement of the public spending for VET.[2] Indicators come from harmonised Eurostat data (Eurostat, 2012a, b).
- *Firms' involvement in VET*: we use the share of students enrolled in programmes that combine school- and work-based provision of initial VET (typically apprenticeships), based on Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data (OECD, 2017: 258).[3]

Figure 5.1 displays a wide variation across YOUNG_ADULLLT countries in reference to their degree of public investment (Y axis), firms' involvement in VET (X axis) and the youth unemployment rate (marker's size).[4] Unsurprisingly, Germany (40 per cent) and Austria (33 per cent) are the ones displaying the largest share of students combining school- and work-based learning, followed by the UK (22 per cent) and Finland (10 per cent). The rest of the countries present comparatively low or zero levels of students enrolled in this kind of programmes.[5]

With regard to the degree of public investment in VET in relation to the number of students, Finland displays comparatively the largest investment, followed by Austria. The remaining countries show a similar public spending in VET.[6]

Mapping the relative position of the nine countries against the four skill formation regimes, Austria can be clearly classified in the collective skill formation regime, while Germany displays the highest degree of firms' involvement, but a more limited public commitment. The UK displays middle levels of public commitment and firms' involvement in VET, while Finland can be clearly positioned in the statist skill formation model. The remaining countries (i.e. Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Portugal and Spain) can be classified within the liberal model given the inexistent level of firms' involvement in VET and the low or medium public commitment/investment in VET.

At first glance, Figure 5.1 also suggests a negative association between the youth unemployment rate (marker's size) and the degree of firms' involvement in VET (X axis). This is in line with previous research findings, showing that education systems with early tracking and a vocational orientation facilitate labour market allocation, although they also increase social inequality (Shavit and Müller, 1998; Bol and van de Werfhorst, 2013). Nevertheless, these differences in labour market allocation are not only influenced by educational institutions and characteristics of the VET system, but also by the regional education, training and employment opportunities. Table 5.1 presents an approach to the potential supply and demand of youth's skills across the regions under study, including the share of early leavers from education and training (Eurostat, 2014a),[7] the share of youth aged 30–34 with higher educational attainment (ISCED 5–8)[8] (Eurostat, 2014b) and the youth unemployment rate (Eurostat, 2014c).[9]

Overall, data presented suggests a positive association between youth unemployment and the share of early leavers from education and training in the region, and a negative one with the share of higher educated. Although these are not surprising findings, for the purpose of this chapter it is more interesting to take an in-depth look at the variation

Figure 5.1: Public investment and firm involvement in VET by youth unemployment across selected countries (2015)
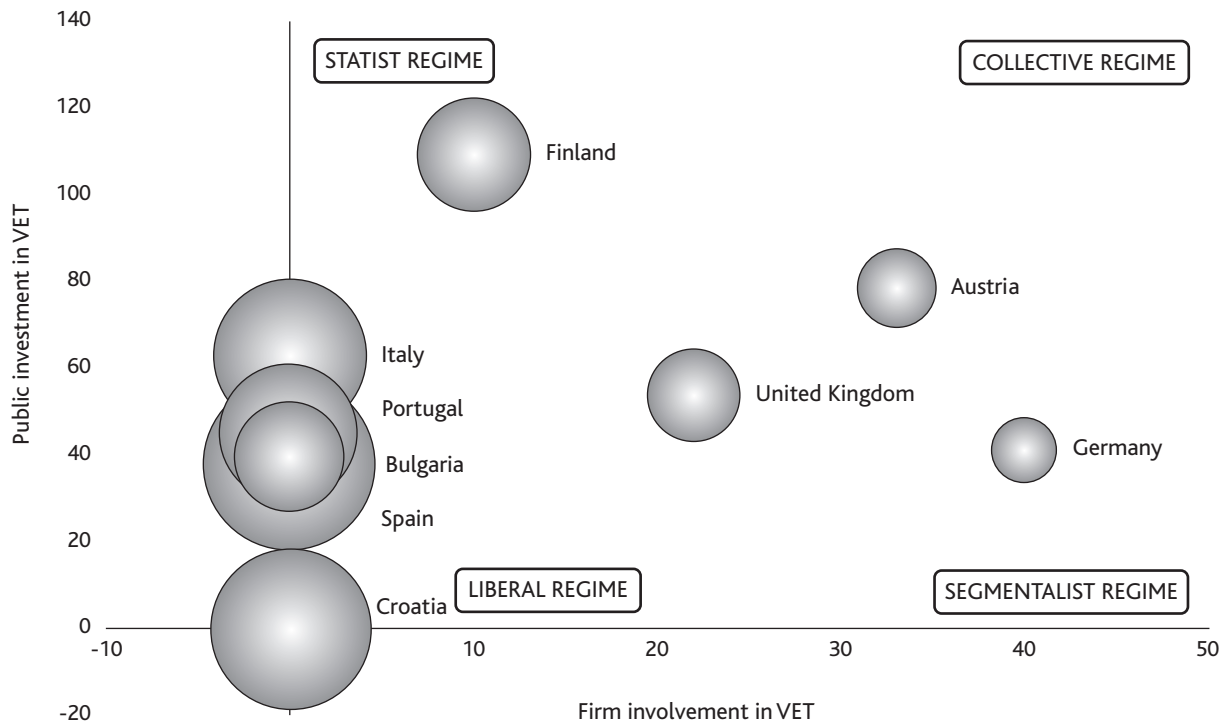
Source: Authors' elaboration, based on Eurostat and OECD data

Effectiveness of LLL policies on youth employment

Table 5.1: Comparison of regional low-/high-skills supply and youth unemployment rate differences between regions within the same country (NUTS 2, 2014)

NUTS 2	Functional region	% Early leavers from education and training	Cross-regional % Δ early leavers from education and training	% Aged 30–34 with higher educational attainment (ISCED 5–8)	Cross-regional % Δ higher educated	% Youth unemployment rate	Cross-regional % Δ Youth unemployment rate	Skill formation regime
Oberösterreich (AT31)	Upper Austria	8.0		33.1		7.9		
Wien (AT13)	Vienna	9.0	1.0	50.4	17.3	18.0	10.1	Collective
Yugozapaden (BG41)	Blagoevgrad	5.9		43.0		16.8		
Yuzhen tsentralen (BG42)	Plovdiv	13.0	7.1	23.2	19.8	28.9	12.1	Eastern-Liberal
Jadranska Hrvatska (HR03)	Istria-County	2.2		31.1		46.5		
Kontinentalna Hrvatska (HR04)	Osijek-Baranja	3.0	0.8	32.7	1.6	45.0	1.5	Eastern-Liberal
Pohjois-ja Itä-Suomi (FI1D)	Kainuu	7.9		40.9		22.1		
Etelä-Suomi (FI1C)	South-west Finland	12.4	4.5	38.0	2.9	22.9	0.8	Statist
Bremen (DE50)	Bremen	14.0		39.4		15.3		
Darmstadt (DE71)	Rhein Main	10.2	3.8	36.6	2.8	9.4	5.9	Collective
Liguria (ITC3)	Genoa	13.6		31.3		45.0		
Lombardia (ITC4)	Milano	12.9	0.7	25.9	5.4	31.2	13.8	Southern-Liberal
Alentejo (PT18)	Litoral Alentejano	18.4		24.9		36.2		
Norte (PT11)	Vale do Ave	19.0	0.6	30.3	5.4	35.7	0.5	Southern-Liberal
Andalucía (ES61)	Málaga	27.7		32.3		61.5		
Catalunya (ES51)	Girona	22.2	5.5	47.0	14.7	47.1	14.4	Southern-Liberal
North-eastern Scotland (UKM5)	Aberdeen City & Shire Region	13.2		60.7		8.3		
West Scotland (UKM3)	Glasgow City Region	14.3	1.1	54.9	5.8	19.3	11.0	Liberal

Source: Authors' elaboration, based on Eurostat data

between regions in the same country – which present very similar or identical education and training systems and LLL policies (see Table 5.1). For instance, large differences among regions within the same country are observed in the share of early leavers from education and training in the selected regions in Bulgaria (7.1 per cent), Finland (4.5 per cent) and Spain (5.5%), while in higher educational attainment Austria (17.3 per cent), Bulgaria (19.8 per cent) and Spain (14.7 per cent) display large differences compared to the rest of the countries. Concerning the youth unemployment rate, the largest regional differences are observed among regions in Austria (10.1 per cent), Bulgaria (12.1 per cent), Italy (13.8 per cent), Spain (14.4 per cent) and the UK (11 per cent). Based on the larger cross-regional differences and to ensure representation of different skill formation regimes,[10] we provide in-depth analysis for the following cases: Austria (collective regime), Bulgaria (Eastern liberal regime), Finland (statist regime), Spain (Southern liberal regime) and Scotland (as part of the UK) (liberal regime).

As pointed out earlier in this section, the skill formation regimes literature still takes nation states as the unit of analysis for international comparisons. While education and training systems tend to be designed and monitored at national level, their enactment and implementation takes place in socioeconomically varying regions within a country. Labour market characteristics (e.g. employment opportunities, industries, sectors, firms' size) vary across regions within a nation state. This cross-regional variation influences the opportunities and outcomes of people living in the region, including young adults in vulnerable situations. Hence, the effectiveness of national LLL policies addressed to young adults in vulnerable situations is likely to be influenced by regional labour markets, which is precisely the focus of this research.

Data and methods

We select Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Spain and Scotland (as part of the UK) for in-depth case studies, as these represent different types of skill formation regimes and display socioeconomically contrasting regions within the country. We employ a qualitative approach to identify and discuss the varying effectiveness of LLL policies on youth employment across regions with different labour market demands, our main hypothesis being that regional labour markets moderate the effectiveness of these policies and, thus, youth employment. Three main methods have been used to address this objective: desk-based review of academic literature, semi-structured interviews with relevant actors (i.e. policy makers, employers' representatives, trade unions,

skills agencies) involved in regional skill formation (49 in total, five per region on average) and a review of the grey literature (i.e. policy documents, reports) in the selected regions (65 documents in total, six to seven per region on average).[11] The semi-structured interviews aimed at identifying the main regional challenges regarding LLL policies for young adults in vulnerable situations. The main areas covered in the interviews were the policy orientations of the interviewees' institutions, the regional governance of the skill formation system and the implications for young adults in the region. A qualitative content analysis of the texts (i.e. interview transcriptions and documents) has been applied using thematic coding to identify the main topics related to the regional skill formation systems (Bowen, 2009; Schreier, 2012). Seven coordinated research teams across the five countries under study replicated this exercise following the same analytical framework, data collection methods, analysis tools and reporting guidelines. The interviews were conducted between March and July 2017 and took place face to face where possible, while telephone or Skype interviews were conducted when the remoteness of the area or the availability of the interviewees required it. The results of the analysis for each region were summarised in national reports, which were used for the comparative report on which this chapter builds (Capsada–Munsech et al, 2018). The units of analysis are functional regions (FRs), as conceptualised by Klapka and colleagues (2013) and extensively discussed in Chapter 2 in this volume (Parreira do Amaral et al, 2019).

Similar LLL policies, different regional labour markets

Although there are clear differences in education and training systems among countries, inexistent or minor differences are observed across regions in the same country. Across the ten FRs under consideration, at least one institution has been identified that provides information to young adults on the educational and training options available. In most cases these are national institutions coordinated at the national level (e.g. Federal Ministry in Austrian FRs, Ministry of Education in Bulgarian FRs, Autonomous Community Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Labour Agency in Spanish FRs, National Skills Agency, Funding Council and Qualification Authority in the Scottish FRs); while the FRs in Finland are the only ones relying on regional and local institutions (i.e. regional councils and municipalities of Kainuu and south-west Finland). However, the skill formation challenges faced vary across regions within and between countries. Based on the interviews with relevant actors and stakeholders at the

regional level, we identify a number of key issues in reference to the skill formation system that affect young adults' education and training opportunities in the region, especially relevant to those who find themselves in vulnerable situations.

One of the commonalities identified across all regions under study is that beyond the national education and training institutions and policies, the cross-regional differences in skill formation challenges are very much influenced by regional labour market demands. Across all FRs, interviewees pointed out that one of the most relevant objectives of the skill formation system targeting young adults – and especially those in vulnerable situations – is providing education, training and skills valued in the regional labour market. Only in two FRs out of ten (i.e. Glasgow FR, south-west Finland FR) were other purposes of skill formation for young adults explicitly mentioned (i.e. social inclusion, self-esteem, mental health). Given this strong focus on education, training and skills for work, two common policies have been identified across most regions concerning skill formation: apprenticeships schemes and employability training courses.

When apprenticeships are not the solution

Across countries and regions under study, apprenticeships are regarded as a good work-based learning policy to introduce young adults into the world of work. However, their relevance differs across regions depending on the type and level of skills demanded in the regional labour market. Moreover, their effectiveness is also influenced by their degree of development.

In the FRs with underdeveloped apprenticeship systems, interviewees identify this lack of development as one of the main causes of youth unemployment in the region. As mentioned by an interviewee in the FR of Blagoevgrad (Bulgaria), the assumption is that a more developed VET system, including a greater share of work-based learning, would improve youth's practical skills and equip them with the type of skills employers are looking for:

> During the training in vocational schools and university it is necessary to have more apprenticeships and internships to support the formation of practical skills of young people. (WP_6E_BG_B_1)

The limitations of the apprenticeships (i.e. lack of vacancies and quality assurance) are not usually taken into consideration in initial stages

of their implementation, but they emerge in countries and regions where this policy has a more long-standing history. In Aberdeen FR (Scotland, UK) one of the consequences of the 2014 oil and gas crisis – the most relevant economic sector in the region – has been the scarcity of available apprenticeship vacancies, as a non-negligible number of apprenticeship positions became redundant. The result is that young adults in the most vulnerable situations (e.g. lower soft skills levels and/or limited social networks) are left without a work placement. As expressed by one of the interviewees in the region:

> The main challenges at the moment are created by the downturn in oil and gas. For the first time in many, many years there are much less opportunities for young entrants to the labour market, whether it's through graduate level entry, apprenticeship entry or trainee-led entry. There has been a large scale number of redundancies and that's obviously impacted on the number of opportunities for youngsters. (WP6_E_UK_ACAR_2)

Similarly, in the FRs of Vienna (Austria) there are not enough apprenticeship vacancies available to place all students. In Austria, the value of attaining and gaining an apprenticeship certificate goes beyond technical and practical skills: employers recognise it as a proof of being able to commit to work and engage in a working culture. In Vienna FR concerns have also been directed towards the quality assurance of the VET system and how to monitor the process. As stated by one of the interviewees 'If you do not want to devaluate the apprenticeship system somebody has to assess it' (WP6_E_AT_V_3). Most apprenticeships in the region are hosted by small and medium enterprises in the service sector, which are already struggling with quality assurance and might consider withdrawal from the apprenticeship system if quality control increases. However, the Austrian government is concerned about the quality of this practical training. As expressed by one of the policy makers in the region:

> The Chamber of Commerce operates the apprenticeship as an authority and there are major problems in terms of quality assurance. Because they just do not want us to make any regulations or introduce new quality assurance tools. […] There are very few industrial apprenticeships in Vienna. They are all in the commercial or service sector. Those

> which are hosted by small businesses, they are confronted
> with a big quality problem from our point of view. Because
> we consider the apprenticeship a very, very useful training,
> the quality has to be secured. (WP6_E_AT_V_1)

Unsurprisingly, the young adults in more vulnerable situations are the
ones most likely to end up in lower-quality apprenticeship positions
or without one, as employers are more eager to train those perceived
as the best:

> There is a big fight for a certain group of young people.
> Actually, everyone wants to have the best ones from the
> beginning. We will see if this is getting a bit more relaxed
> with the young refugees who have come. However, the
> companies want the most capable ones and vocational
> schools too. (WP6_E_AT_V_1)

It is interesting to see how the relevance and concerns about
apprenticeships have been pointed out in FRs with a comparatively
high share of youth with higher education in the country. For instance,
in Bulgaria the share of higher educated youth is 19.8 per cent higher
in Blagoevgrad FR compared to Plovdiv FR. Similarly, Vienna FR
outpaces Upper Austria FR by 17.3 per cent in the proportion of
higher educated; in Scotland the proportion of higher educated youth
is 5.8 per cent higher in Aberdeen FR than in Glasgow FR. The only
country under study in which regional interviewees have not explicitly
manifested any concerns about the apprenticeships is Finland, where
both FRs (i.e. Kainuu and south-west Finland) present a similarly high
proportion of youth with higher education. One of the interviewees
in south-west Finland (WP6_E_FI_SF_3) pointed out that firms have
usually considered apprenticeships as additional training to the school-
based vocational training, and youth below the age of 25 are not the
main target group for apprenticeships.

From a comparative perspective, these findings reinforce the idea that
apprenticeships are more widely available in skill formation regimes
with high involvement from employers. However, the relevance of
these apprenticeships is questioned in regions with a highly educated
labour force and a significant demand of high skills from the regional
labour market. Moreover, the effectiveness of the apprenticeship
model seems to decrease in periods of economic recession or when
the predominant economic sectors go through difficulties, resulting
in a limited offer of work placements.

Employability courses: training for what jobs?

Although employability training courses designed and promoted at the national level allow for regional flexibility to adapt these to regional labour market demands, the strong focus on the (re)training of youth to move them into employment has not always taken into consideration the varying quantity and quality of employment opportunities across regions. As illustrated in the following paragraphs, the effectiveness of employability training is questioned in regions where there are limited – or even non-existent – employment opportunities for young adults. Moreover, in some regions the predominance of a specific industry or sector providing precarious employment also raises concerns about the appropriateness of training youth for these jobs. In addition to this, in some of these cases employability training seems to compensate for the limited degree of firms' involvement in youth's training.

   Among the countries under study, it is not surprising that this type of employability training policy is more widespread across countries where there is a more limited involvement of firms in the skills formation system. However, as pointed out by some of the interviewees in these regions, this usually suggests changing labour market needs, scarce employment opportunities for youth or unattractive working conditions in the region (i.e. temporary contracts, low-skilled and low-waged work). In turn, these situations raise the question whether it is desirable to tailor the regional employability training courses to meet this type of labour market need. More specifically, in the Finnish FR of Kainuu there are concerns with reference to the necessary time frame and resources to develop new programmes to meet regional employment needs:

> It can take years to change the machine that produces degrees. Creating new vocational study programmes takes years. And then the question is: what about the teaching staff? Which are their skills? Who would be the teachers in the new study programmes? What happens to the old teachers? (WP6_E_FI_K_3)

Likewise, an interviewee from the Spanish FR of Málaga (WP6_E_SP_MA_1) states that there is a time gap between the moment a study survey of training/employers' needs takes place and the training is up and running, leading to discrepancies between the available training and the regional labour market needs. However, in this Spanish FR, characterised by a high percentage of youth

unemployment, these employability training courses are also used as a way to get early leavers from education and training back into the education and training system. Still, education and training is regarded as the main solution to the problem of young people's unemployment:

> We attributed content to the 'professional certificates' to make them comparable to formal education. It is, thus, a useful certified training, which facilitates the later incorporation to the formal education system. Therefore, the main idea of this training is that those that did not have a formal qualification get it at the end of the training and it helps them progress either to further education or in their career. (WP6_E_SP_MA_1)

> Let's imagine a 19–20-year-old boy who left education and training and who wants to later reenter into the system. He could retake it from there [i.e. employability training courses] and later upgrade to higher levels. (WP6_E_SP_MA_2)

Similar concerns about meeting the needs of a regional labour market arise across FRs that have a predominant employment sector, such as the oil and gas industry in Aberdeen FR, tourism in Girona and Málaga (Spain), metal and wood in Kainuu and automobile and marine industries in south-west Finland. Tailoring the employability courses to meet the needs of these specific industries or sectors facilitates youth employment in the region. Nevertheless, employment dependence on specific industries or sectors might also have negative consequences for young adults and the region, like the low-skilled but plentiful tourism sector jobs in Girona and Málaga FRs or the difficult working conditions of the metal and wood industries in Kainuu FRs. Moreover, the dependence on a single regional industry or sector of the economy makes youth more vulnerable to exogenous changes (e.g. the oil and gas crisis in Aberdeen FR) and might promote unbalanced demographic structures in terms of gender and age. However, as suggested by an interviewee in Finland, the voice of employers usually makes a stronger case than that of young adults:

> It is a fact that the standpoints and opinions of certain actors and interest groups are more influential than those of the others when decisions are made. I can easily imagine that on the ongoing VET-reform the voice of students' organisations has not been heard as loud as the voice of

the labour market organisations or the Ministry. Who has the money, has the power as well. (WP6_E_FIN_NAT_3)

Similarly, FRs with a predominant urban area (e.g. Girona FR, Glasgow FR, Vienna FR) are poles of attraction for high-skilled demand – especially in the business and information and communications technology sectors – but these also coexist with a contrasting share of low-skilled demand – especially in the service sector. As stated by one of the interviewees in Girona FR:

> There is still a lot of work to be done in transforming the hotel industry into a rigorous, formal, monitored productive sector providing appealing training and mid-term careers for people. (WP6_SP_GI_1)

Some of the interviewees in these urban FRs wonder how desirable it is from a public perspective to meet the regional labour demands of low-skilled jobs. From a short-term perspective, it might raise youth's employment figures, but also trap them in low-skilled jobs in the long run.

Finally, a cross-cutting topic raised across all FRs is: Who is responsible for developing youth's transferable communication and discipline skills? Beyond technical knowledge and skills, employers appreciate and require youth who can effectively communicate, behave and follow orders, as well as commit and have positive attitudes towards work. As suggested by an interviewee in the Finnish FR of Kainuu:

> Many times the employers are not looking for someone who already knows everything, but they look for a suitable type, one who is nice to work with and one that can show they are able and willing to learn. (WP6_E_FI_K_1)

In like manner, in the Spanish FRs employers and policy makers refer to this type of youth as the ones 'who love their work and what they do' (WP6_E_SP_MA_3) and 'who are motivated to work' (WP6_E_SP_GI_9). Employers consider these to be employability skills and would appreciate these being developed as part of employability training. However, many interviewees across FRs question the assumption that LLL policies supported with public funds should be responsible for promoting these skills. The main argument is that it would attribute legitimacy to employers' demands in relation to the lack of 'maturity' of young candidates and their

limited working experience, which are usually unrealistic. An example of these concerns in the Blagoevgrad FR follows:

> I think that sometimes employers have high expectations to the qualifications and experience of young people who are at the beginning of their professional career and are about to improve. (WP6_E_BG_B_2)

However, as one of the interviewees in Aberdeen FR pointed out, employers are not always sure about what they need:

> There's the kind of disconnect between the employers' expectations, particularly with young people, and it's often based on prejudice and a lack of awareness of young people's degree of working experience. So, one of the things that struck me when I joined [the organisation] was that employers were quite quick to tell me what they didn't like, but were less quick to tell me what they actually needed. And very often that was based on perceptions of young people; the views of what they didn't like were based on perception rather than reality. (WP6_E_ UK_ACAR_3)

In sum, the promotion at the national level of employability training courses aiming to meet regional labour market demands is not always feasible and/or desirable from a youth employment perspective. In regions with limited employment opportunities for young adults, the effectiveness of these policies is uncertain. Alternative policy solutions designed to redirect young adults into the formal education and training system seem more adequate in these cases. Conversely, in some regions the existence of employment opportunities does not necessarily mean that these are desirable from a social perspective. If the only available opportunities are precarious forms of employment, it is arguable to what extent public policies should be supporting training in these sectors.

Conclusions

The main LLL policy responses to the high youth unemployment rates in the European countries and regions under study have been delivered in the form of apprenticeships and employability training courses. The comparative analysis shows how existing typologies of skill formation regimes adequately capture institutional differences in terms of

education and training provision. The clearest example is the wide availability of the apprenticeship offer in countries where employers are highly involved in training. However, the effectiveness of these schemes vary in terms of time and space. The changing economic cycle affects the capacity of companies to offer work placements to young adults. Additionally, the configuration of regional labour markets affects the level and the structure of the skills demanded (intermediate vs high skills). In the case of employability training courses, the influence of regional labour markets is even more important than in the case of apprenticeships. The effectiveness of this type of training courses is largely questioned in regions where the availability of jobs is scarce and/or the working conditions are very precarious. Investing a large sum of public funds in training for jobs that do not exist or that do not offer decent living conditions to their employees does not seem the most reasonable policy option. Our findings point out the importance of considering the regional/local level in comparative research, in particular because labour market demand impacts the effectiveness of LLL policies. Therefore, we can conclude that the 'supply-side fundamentalism' that has dominated European LLL agendas is not helping national and regional governments to support young adults in vulnerable situations to transition from education to the world of work, and that the inclusion of demand-side factors at the regional level should be taken into account to promote more effective LLL policies.

Notes

[1] NUTS stands for Nomenclature of Territorial Units of Statistics of the European Union. See Table 5.1 for detailed correspondence between the FRs under study and NUTS 2. The YOUNG_ADULLLT project focused on the following countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Scotland (UK).

[2] Data on public spending is unavailable for Croatia.

[3] See Table C 1.3 in https://static.rasset.ie/documents/news/2017/09/oecd.pdf. This indicator is not available for Croatia.

[4] Since no specific data for Scotland is available, we use data for the United Kingdom as a whole.

[5] No data available for Bulgaria and Croatia.

[6] No data available for Croatia.

[7] Early leavers from education and training (Eurostat, 2014a): share of 18–24 year olds who have completed at most lower secondary education and are not currently involved in any further education or training at NUTS 2. We use it as a proxy of the low-skilled youth supply at the regional level.

8 Population with higher education attainment (Eurostat, 2014b): share of the population aged 30–34 with higher educational attainment (ISCED 5–8) at NUTS 2. We use it as a proxy of the high-skilled youth supply at the regional level.

9 Youth unemployment rate (Eurostat, 2014c): people aged 15–24 without employment and actively looking for a job at the national and NUTS 2 levels. Data corresponding to 2014, except for Bremen (2011) and north-east Scotland (2015). We use it as a proxy for the demand/labour market opportunities at the regional level.

10 None of the countries under study in the YOUNG_ADULLLT project can be classified in the segmentalist skill formation regime.

11 See Tables 5 and 6 in the annex of the WP6 – International Report analysis of skill supply and demand for a detailed list of interviewees' affiliation and grey literature reviewed (http://www.young-adulllt.eu/publications/working-paper).

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Governing the normalisation of young adults through lifelong learning policies

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Introduction

Policies are based on assumptions – be they explicit or implicit – of a desired society with well-functioning institutions and reasonably behaving individuals. This is to say that policies are built on a conception of a reasonable order of things, and various policy measures aim at governing, maintaining or strengthening this order. In a liberal democracy, to govern a society is to govern autonomous individuals in their decisions and actions. Since the 1980s, education policy implemented in the Western world has been framed by neoliberal political rationality with a vocabulary mostly drawn from economic doctrines and reasoning. In this context, lifelong learning (LLL) can be seen as a technology of governmentality (Edwards, 2002; Fejes, 2005; Ball, 2009). Today, the ideology of LLL is an accepted truth of the 'knowledge society'. LLL is seen as an effective tool not only for improving competitiveness and enhancing growth but also for advancing social integration and self-disciplined, responsible and active citizenship (Jessop et al, 2008; Olssen, 2008; Walker, 2009; Kinnari and Silvennoinen, 2019).

In this chapter, the presupposed logic underlying LLL policy measures targeted at young adults, and 'vulnerable' youths in particular, is scrutinised. The term vulnerable carries connotations that steer policy makers and policy actors to perceive individuals in a certain way. Use of the term may also cause vulnerable persons to see themselves differently from their original self-conception. This is the intersectional point at which political governing and individual self-governing meet (see Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1999; Dean, 2010). Although individualised society and individualised decisions concerning one's life course have

been much debated, there is an underlying implicit norm in LLL policies regarding the structure and characteristics of a desired life course. The very conception of normality implies a strong normative representation of the stages that the life course of a productive citizen should follow. Deviation from the 'normal' life course marks a person as a mental outlaw who is not thought to be aware of his or her need to be protected and guided by society.

Research questions and data

In this chapter, the focus is on the ways in which LLL policies induce young adults to govern their reasoning and conduct according to a preferred direction. In addition to theoretical analysis, policy documents and descriptions of policy measures and projects, interviews with young adults and experts in Finland are utilised to make sense of the practices of governing young adults' normalisation.

This chapter builds on analyses of the following data: key Finnish LLL policy documents (N = 26) published by national- and regional-level actors in the fields of labour market, education and youth policies from 2007 to 2016;[1] 19 thematic interviews of national and regional LLL policy experts; and 19 biographical interviews of young adults (12 females and seven males). Two contrasting regions, south–west Finland and Kainuu, were chosen as contexts for the study as they differ in terms of socio-demographic features and educational and labour market opportunities available to young people. South–west Finland is a wealthy region with a growing population and versatile educational and labour market opportunities. Compared to south–west Finland, there are much fewer post-compulsory educational opportunities in Kainuu and labour markets are more closed to young adults, meaning that young adults living in Kainuu are in many cases forced to leave their home regions due to the scarcity of educational, employment and life opportunities. To capture the dynamics and interaction of policy-making across different fields and levels, both high–level national experts and street-level regional experts from the fields of education, labour market and youth and social policies were interviewed.

Although the empirical focus is on one country, the argument is that the findings of this study have international relevance. By utilising the variety of data, the aim is not only to reach a comprehensive understanding of LLL policies in one country, but also to place the results within an international context.

The goal is not to describe how successful Finnish LLL policies have been in helping vulnerable youths, youth at risk or young people

not in employment, education or training (NEETs). The Finnish context serves instead as an empirical case for answering the following questions:

- How the perspectives of governance, life course and cultural political economy (CPE) are interwoven in national policy documents representing the political demands, objects and ideology of national (Finnish) LLL policies? What do they indicate about the hegemony of normality, and measures to determine and define it?
- In what ways do young adults and experts react to LLL policies and what are their experiences and opinions of the policies? How do they perceive the measures for controlling (restricting or empowering) young adults' opportunities in society, the labour market and as citizens?

In the following section, the theoretical perspectives of *governance*, *life course* and *CPE* are discussed, and used to elaborate a holistic understanding of national LLL policies and their connections to the production of normality. This is followed by a short description of the empirical context, Finland, before presenting the findings and conclusions.

Governance, life course and CPE perspectives in understanding the production of normality and LLL policies

As a result of globalisation and the increasing power of transnational actors, the governance of education is in transition (Kotthoff and Klerides, 2015). Globalisation has been described as resulting in a rescaling of politics and policy (Lingard and Rawolle, 2011). The new architecture of governance relies on the production and mobility of data (Clarke, 2012; Ball, 2016) and aims to govern through standardisation, commensuration, transparency and comparison (Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal, 2003). This rests on the provision and translation of information about subjects, objects and processes, and brings new limits and possibilities for agents (cf Hansen and Flyverbom, 2014).

Places are the locus where all scales conflate, from the supranational through to the national and the local. There, the educational system is manifested as real schools embedded in a web of multi-scalar and multi-actor relations. Agents' degree of freedom to define and implement strategies, make decisions and access resources relies on those relations, although they are never able to fully determine freedoms, nor directly

realise intended aims (Gideonse, 1993; Cramer et al, 2012; Dale et al, 2012; Kazepov et al, 2015; Rinne, 2019). Patrick Le Galès (2004: 243) defines governance as:

> a coordination process of actors, social groups and institutions that aims at reaching collectively defined and discussed objectives. Governance then concerns the whole range of institutions, networks, directives, regulations, norms, political and social uses as well as public and private actors which contribute to the stability of a society and a political regime, to its orientation, to its capacity to lead, to deliver services and to assume its legitimacy.

The principles of calculability and measurability, usually used in the private sector and originating from economics, are increasingly transferred to fields previously regulated by old bureaucratic statutes and professional norms, typically located in the public sector. Rose (1999: 152) refers to the new governing technology, which is based on accountability and assessment and to which the public sector is subjected through governance at a distance (Rinne and Ozga, 2011: 67).

Standards, in turn, penetrate all spheres of human life. Standards are not only ubiquitous but also normative. They create ideals and normalities but also the 'less than ideal' and abnormalities. Standards produce social norms, encourage conformity to the ideal and dictate how things ought to be. They restrict decision-making possibilities, set parameters and narrow choice (Gorur, 2013). Standards

> codify collective wisdom about what is acceptable in a given situation, and, explicitly or implicitly, what is not. This may create tension between individual autonomy and the codes of behaviour set by anonymous, distant others, removed from the immediate context by space, time and perhaps understanding. Standardisation is feared by some on the grounds that it promotes mechanistic behaviour, devalues tacit and professional knowledge and attacks our very humanism by voiding idiosyncrasy, individuality, creativity, intuition and emotion. (Gorur, 2013: 132–3)

To ensure conformity, standards are often institutionalised processes involving various kinds of certification and formalisation. The more successfully the standards are mobilised and institutionalised, the less

visible and noticeable they become. Many standards are thoroughly interwoven into the very fabric of our everyday lives, operating upon us in ways we scarcely recognise (Gorur, 2013). Standardisation helps the state and public authorities to compare and rank individuals and groups and to create a common language shared by professionals, policy makers and evaluators. Standards are based on scientific expert knowledge, which grant them legitimacy.

From the life course perspective, the power of standards can be seen in societal expectations concerning a desired 'normal' life course. These expectations are, in turn, reflected in institutional governance of individual life courses and careers. However, individual life courses consist of life phases and transitions that are always constructed in a reciprocal process of political, social and economic conditions, welfare state regulations and provisions, and biographical decisions and investments concerning changing living circumstances. Historical conditions (e.g. economic cycles, wars) and institutional arrangements (such as education systems, labour markets and welfare provisions) influence the shaping of individual biographies. Hence, life course transitions and trajectories are constructed differently in different socio–historical, structural and institutional settings (Heinz et al, 2009).

The de-standardisation of life courses has been noted in many studies over recent decades (EGRIS, 2001; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Eurofound, 2014). Even where life courses have been individualised in many respects (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001; Côté, 2002), an individual's location within power structures still strongly affects their life chances and the formation of their life course (MacDonald et al, 2005; Iannelli and Smyth, 2008; Furlong, 2009). However, in spite of the significance of structural factors such as social class in the life course formation of young people, at the policy level young people are increasingly expected to take responsibility for their own careers, and become self-governing, enterprising and proactive (e.g. Lundahl and Olofsson, 2014).

The CPE perspective highlights the relevance of the cultural dimension in understanding and analysing the complexity of social formations such as policies. LLL policies reflect selective interpretations of problems, explanations of their cause and preferred solutions. The economic and political features of LLL policies are deeply embedded in cultural contexts and broader sets of social relations. By emphasising the variation, selection and retention of particular policy foci and approaches, their objectives and orientations as well as their definition of target groups, CPE invites analysis of policies as the articulation of

semiotic (cultural) and extra-semiotic (structural) moments (Jessop, 2004, 2010).

From the CPE perspective it is appropriate to ask how societal problems are framed. What kind of terminology (such as economic, social and cultural) is used when talking about the phenomenon and its potential solutions? At the level of implementation, practical issues are often the main focus while more general connections between the phenomenon and society are not discussed. Policy documents, for instance, are based on some taken-for-granted perspective. Policy texts construct a problem and its surrounding reality for discussion. Therefore, the description of a phenomenon and its origins, at least implicitly, assumes acceptance of the logic that the reality is built on. The description often depoliticises the subject matter, presenting it as if a clear-cut solution based on, for example, economic principles exists for the problem. In this way, political solutions transform into technical solutions within a given political rationality. Yet with this approach, a large portion of the problem's framework is omitted from the reality constructed within the texts.

The concepts of normality and normal distribution became key models in natural scientific analyses as statistics developed. The normal distribution, Gaussian distribution or bell curve is one of the most commonly used distributions when analysing the aggregation of causally independent events or targets. Lars Grue and Arvid Heiberg (2006: 234) emphasise the concept of *the average man*. They state that even Adolphe Quetelet (1796–1874), a Belgian astronomer, statistician and mathematician, raised the generalised notion of 'normal' as a necessity and an imperative for research. Through medical statistics, the same 'normal' transferred from state level to the level of the human body. Quetelet thought of combining the observational error or error curve, later named normal distribution, to describe not only states but also human properties such as height and weight. According to Quetelet, all human features deviate from the average norm (Rinne, 2016). In this discourse, the average is ideal. The moral and physical qualities of an average person were considered the most valuable features of a population. Larger and smaller deviances began to gain significance as bodily ugliness, a lack of moral virtue or frivolity (Grue and Heidberg, 2006: 235).

From a sociological standpoint, the premise of differentiating between normal and abnormal is a social norm. A social norm is a code of conduct reinforced with sanctions. By presenting norms and using sanctions to fortify their adherence, people and human populations practise social control. Those in power very much define

value hierarchies, and norms are ultimately perceptions of normality to those in power. Power is the ability to make others act in a desired manner. Normative regulation penetrates the institutions of socialisation, such as upbringing and education, and the activities of both families and educational organisations, all the way from primary school to university.

Norms are prescriptive behavioural models and standards that make human behaviour predictable. Norms are dependent on their socio-historical context and, thus, constantly changing. The significance of a norm is realised when conflicts occur between norm systems and deviance in interactional situations. Such deviance reveals the norm, which changes from hidden to visible. Deviance signifies inadaptability to norms. Deviance can be understood as a negative, stigmatised social reaction of others towards the deviant (Rinne, 2016).

Life conditions of young adults in empirical context: the case of Finland

While lifelong learning is the term now most commonly used, this concept has also been known as adult education, recurrent education or permanent education (OECD, 1973; Aspin and Chapman, 2000; Tuijnman and Boström, 2002; Rubenson, 2006; Centeno, 2011; Kinnari and Silvennoinen, 2019). Since the 1960s, the concept has widened to include all kinds of learning environments, shifting focus from civic skills to skills for employment. Although this chapter is not intended to describe Finnish LLL policies as such, there are several reasons why Finland is an interesting case for international comparison:

- high level of skills, for example in mathematics, sciences and literacy, among school-age youth (as tested in the Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA]) as well as among the adult population (Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies);
- high learning outcomes in association with equality of the education system;
- high adult participation rates in education and wide public provision of adult education;
- high private provision of employer-provided, in-service training for the labour force;
- long tradition of liberal adult education system built on Nordic egalitarian values;
- dense network of public libraries.

When compared internationally, Finland reports relatively narrow income and class differences. Socioeconomic and cultural inequalities have been smaller than in most European countries. One reason for small class differences is the cultural homogeneity of the population. Implemented policies have certainly had an impact on the extent of class differences as well. However, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) statistics (OECD, 2015, 2016a) show that income differences in Finland have grown since the beginning of the 1990s.

Since the recession at the beginning of the 1990s and the financial crisis following 2008, there have been considerable budget cuts to the welfare state, shifting the emphasis in a more selective and market-oriented direction with significant impacts on education. Centralised steering, especially of education, was drastically reduced in the 1990s while decentralisation, deregulation and decision-making powers of local administration were increased (Rinne, 2014; Berisha et al, 2017).

The Finnish education system is characteristically intertwined with the Nordic notion of the welfare state, emphasising equal opportunities. As one of the key elements of the Nordic welfare model, the comprehensive school system is identified by universal, non-selective and free basic education provided by the public sector. PISA results from the early 2000s onwards show not only high average levels in learning outcomes, but also that the share of low achievers is comparatively small. The Finnish school system has been successful in compensating for the poor socioeconomic background of pupils. The school-to-school variation in learning outcomes is one of the smallest in OECD countries. Young people have relatively good educational opportunities at the upper secondary and tertiary level. However, roughly 5 to 10 per cent of young people in each age cohort do not continue to further education or training after basic education. Their situation is deteriorating as competition in the labour market increases.

Furthermore, according to recent developments in PISA assessments, all positive characteristics of the Finnish school system have been deteriorating since 2000. The effect of socioeconomic background on learning outcomes has increased, average proficiency levels in literacy, mathematics and sciences have dropped substantially, and the proportion of pupils with a low level of skills has grown significantly (OECD, 2013, 2016b).

Moreover, the employment prospects of Finnish young people have deteriorated in recent decades. The Finnish economy has suffered two crises since the 1980s; first in the early 1990s, and then as an effect of the global financial crisis from 2008 onwards. After the financial

crisis of 2008, unemployment among young people has increased, particularly for males. Uncertain employment prospects have also had a discouraging effect in terms of educational motivation, especially for those young people who score at the low end of the achievement curve. The NEET rate for 20- to 24-year-old males in particular has increased significantly since 2010 (Alatalo et al, 2017).

Living conditions and opportunity structures for young people vary significantly across Finland. The capital city Helsinki and its metropolitan area provide better opportunities for education and employment than remote areas in the eastern and northern parts of the country. The general trend since the 1960s has seen a concentration of the population in southern parts of the country, as the northern and eastern parts become more and more sparsely populated. A rising dependency ratio, due to an ageing population, is a national concern. In 2017, the number of children born in Finland reached a historic low since the famine of 1866–8, despite the population having more than doubled. Nonetheless, Finnish young adults seem to be more satisfied across life domains than their European counterparts (see Figure 6.1).

The differences are particularly large in the domains of accommodation, job satisfaction and overall life satisfaction. However, as elsewhere in Europe, there are gender differences, young Finnish women being more satisfied with their life situation than young men.

Ideology and aims: policy documents

In Finland, general guidelines and action plans for the implementation of LLL policies are included in government programmes. The same is true for strategic priorities and objectives related to employment and education, which, in turn, are integrated into key programmes. In the most recent government programmes (2011, 2014 and 2015), main priorities have included the stabilisation of public finances and increased employment rates. Governments have focused on extending career paths at both ends and finding ways to speed up young people's transitions from school to work. When reforming educational practices, the current government is focused on strengthening ties between educational institutions and businesses. A reduction in the number of youths not in education or work, as well as the number of education interruptions have been set as goals for this government term (Prime Minister's Office, 2015: 17–19).

In accordance with government targets, youth and labour market policies focus primarily on improving the well-being and employment

Figure 6.1: Satisfaction in various life domains of population aged 25–34 by gender, EU-28 and Finland
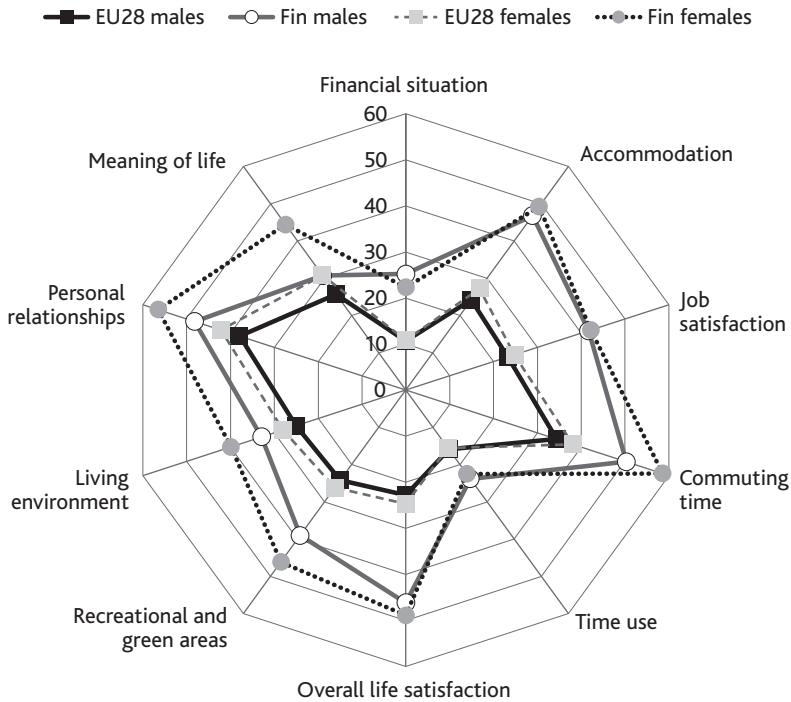
prospects of young people. Educational policies in turn aim at reducing education interruptions, shortening study durations and improving the connection between education and working life (MEC, 2012c). The importance of developing apprenticeship training and other forms of work-based learning, as well as competence recognition, is highlighted in order to support individual education and career paths (MEC, 2012b). In general, the aim is to align education with to the needs of businesses (in terms of content and structure, for example, competence-based qualifications) and ensure that the number of people being trained corresponds to the needs of the labour market. This is intended to make education more attractive and result in greater numbers of young people gaining employment (Finnish National Board of Education, 2015: 71–4).

In Finnish LLL policies, special measures are targeted at groups assumed to be facing the highest risk of becoming socially excluded, such as NEETs, early school leavers, unemployed youths, vocational school dropouts, immigrants and disabled youths. It appears that

the success criteria for these policies are whether employment and graduation rates improve among young people belonging to these supposed risk groups. According to the Child and Youth Policy Programme (MEC, 2012b), preventing discrimination towards children and youths belonging to various minorities should be a priority. The listed minority groups include immigrants, traditional Finnish minorities such as the Romani people and the indigenous Sami people, people with disabilities, and groups that differ from the majority in terms of gender identity or sexual orientation. In addition, gender and age groups are mentioned separately (MEC, 2012a: 6–7, 28; 2012c).

Despite the recent de-standardisation of life courses, a normative ideal path for young people based on a standardised and linear life course model can be found in policy documents. Furthermore, young people are expected to complete their degree within the given target time and find a job after graduation (MEC, 2012c: 33). However, those policies that assume the prevalence of 'normal' life courses do not take into account the fact that career progressions are often non-linear and strongly influenced by actions, events and circumstances that lie beyond the control of individuals. According to the careership theory (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 2008), career-related decision-making is bounded by a person's horizons for action, which enable him or her to see opportunities within them, but at the same time prevent him or her from seeing what lies beyond them. Horizons for action are influenced by social position as well as by embodied dispositions (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), which, in turn, are interconnected. Dispositions influence the ways individuals think and act within their horizons of action, which are both objective and subjective (Hodkinson, 2008).

Young people face a weak position in the labour and education markets resulting from a lack of jobs. In turn this narrows their horizons for action and contributes to negative visions of their own futures. This phenomenon sits within a wider context of a decline in low-skilled jobs and an increasingly highly educated population, resulting in intensified competition among individuals for the available training places and jobs. As a result of these changes, people who have struggled in formal education are losing faith in their ability to compete for decently paid work.

Sanctions are a common element of Finnish employment policies targeting disadvantaged young people (usually defined as poorly educated, with difficulties in finding employment). The primary goal of government is to reduce the number of young people categorised

as unemployed. One common method for achieving this appears to be tightening the conditions for receiving unemployment assistance. Since 1996, 18 to 24 year olds who have not completed a vocational qualification have been obliged to undertake educational programmes in order to receive unemployment benefits. A young person must apply to at least three educational programmes in the joint application, and if they are accepted, they must start and complete the programme in order to be entitled to receive unemployment benefits. This measure tightens the conditions for receiving unemployment benefits targets individuals, while failing to, even indirectly, target the structure of labour demand and the number of available jobs. The most important criterion that defines the measure's success is a decrease in the number of youths who do not have a degree and receive unemployment benefits.

Thoughts and experiences: interviews

LLL policies represent not only societal expectations but also public interventions that aim to bring about preferred visions of individual development and a 'normal' life course. From this viewpoint, it becomes crucial to examine how the implicit assumptions included in the structure and characteristics of the desired and 'normal' life course, which are present in LLL policies, correspond with young people's own experiences, expectations and opportunities.

Despite the increasing de-standardisation of life courses, in Finland LLL policies are still arguably based on the assumed prevalence of an ideal, late-industrial, standardised life course model (Mayer, 2004), which separates young adults' lives into two phases: first, full-time education and, later, full-time employment. However, using a 'normal' life course as a standard against which the success of LLL policies is measured can be problematised given that volatile European labour markets increasingly create diversified and uncertain pathways into and within the employment system and, thus, lead to more age variability in occupational and private transitions (Heinz et al, 2009).

Despite the influence of people's locations within power structures on their life chances and the formation of their life courses (Järvinen and Vanttaja, 2013; Vauhkonen et al, 2017), there are attempts to treat structural problems, such as a lack of jobs, through LLL policy measures targeted at individuals. In this respect, however, the views of national high-level and regional street-level experts significantly differed from each other. While the national-level experts recognised the existence of structural problems, the regional-level experts working closely

with young adults in their everyday lives did not see young people's disadvantage as stemming from structural constraints, but primarily from their individual life situations and problems. According to the high-level national policy experts who were interviewed, the main challenges facing young adults are the difficult economic situation and regional and social polarisation:

> At least the official truth is that our economy is not in a good condition, and due to that there have been cuts to different services. […] you can see the budget cuts starting from child welfare clinics and compulsory schools and so on. In all of them we can see that things are not on such a good level as we would like to see them. And this is then naturally reflected in the possibilities that young people have in their lives. The regional differences have slowly started to grow, and people from different regions and backgrounds are not in an equal position in relation to this system. The more financial stability there is in the family and the closer to big cities you live, the better your possibilities in life. (E_FI_NAT_3)

> I would say that polarisation is the one challenge that emerges strongly. […] For us it shows itself as a regional issue, like how education is organised, how education is accessed, what the available possibilities are. […] And I do see that one of the big challenges for us with the big group of young people is how the regional policy is constructed. (E_FI_NAT_1)

In contrast to the views of national-level experts, the individualisation of structural problems was evident in interviews with regional-level experts. They had difficulty in seeing beyond individual circumstances and local policy context. In the interviews, they emphasised the significance of policy priorities that encourage young adults to take responsibility for their own lives. For the regional-level experts across different LLL policy fields and both functional regions, lack of self-confidence and self-esteem were recognised as being among the main challenges influencing young adults' participation in policy initiatives. The following excerpt echoes findings from studies into transition policies showing that at a policy level young people themselves are increasingly expected to take responsibility for their careers and be self-governing, enterprising and proactive (e.g. Lundahl and Olofsson,

2014). In other words, it is young people who have problems, not society:

> Our goal is to work out how to activate young people, to wake them up and get them motivated about their own lives, whether it is a case of going to school or work or rehabilitation, or strengthening their self-esteem. Our objective here is to solve these problems that young people have. (E_FI_K_2)

Furthermore, street-level experts did not critically reflect on the possible unintended consequences of the measures, but emphasised their empowering aspects, which they saw as increasing young adults' opportunities in the labour market and as citizens:

> I mean everyone has difficulties in admitting their problems and challenges in life. And when you talk and talk and talk about them, they become something you don't have to be ashamed of […] Identifying them and talking about them has in a way influenced the fact that this young person finds it easier to accept themselves and get experiences of success. (E_FI_SF_4)

Similarly, the vast majority of young adults interviewed in this study shared the experts' view of the empowering nature of policy measures they had participated in:

> The work here [LLL policy measures] has given me so much, like strength. […] I probably couldn't have coped with a normal job, or at least I couldn't have trusted that. So this rehabilitative thing that I started was the best option. (Y_FI_SF_6)

It is important to note, however, that although the policy measures may have been successful in empowering young people, this masks the fact that without changes to the local opportunity structure, the future labour market prospects of these young adults will remain poor.

The key questions related to individual agency are, what kinds of beliefs and perspectives do the individuals have of their future possibilities, to what extent do they feel in control of their lives and how do they view what is possible for them? For the young adults interviewed in this study, their horizons for action were more or less

restricted. Interestingly, in many cases they were still using the 'normal' life course as a standard against which they compared their own biographies and future plans. The young adults demonstrated rather normative and conventional understandings of adulthood despite the accumulating challenges they faced and the disadvantaged situations they were living in:

> I hope I will have a job, and perhaps my spouse and I would have our own house and a vegetable garden. (Y_FI_SF_2)

> At least I would like to think that I will have a job and a husband and perhaps also a child. And our own home. Just kind of basic dreams. (YI_SF_K_4)

Interestingly, the differences in regional opportunity structures were not particularly reflected in the young adults' perceived and planned life projects. Furthermore, many young adults had internalised societal and structural problems, seeing the reason for their problems and struggles in themselves. For instance, in the interviews conducted in Kainuu where youth unemployment is higher than the national average, young adults attributed their troubles finding employment to being 'failures' themselves, an attitude also recognised by the interviewed experts. Thus, they defined themselves as 'slow learners' or stated that 'it's just me that can't learn' without recognising the impact of their social environment or schooling arrangements on their educational success and choices:

> I don't know why, but remembering things was difficult. I studied for exams and I remembered the things I studied for a short while, but it just did not stick in my head […] Or, you know, in vocational school it was somehow really irritating when the others were always ahead and I, even easy things, God damn, I didn't understand or couldn't do. (Y_FI_K_7)

A view similar to that illustrated in this excerpt emerged in several interviews.

Conclusion and discussion

Young adults struggle to gain a foothold in the labour market all over Europe. In many countries, young adults living in central and

peripheral regions face very different future prospects. Due to the scarcity of educational and labour market opportunities, in Finland people born in northern and eastern parts of the country tend to move to southern cities after completing compulsory or upper secondary education. The risk of poverty and social exclusion has especially increased in northern and eastern regions of Finland.

The analysis shows that the concepts of governance, life course and CPE are interwoven in national policy documents, contributing to the hegemony of normality, especially normal life courses. However, using a 'normal' life course as a standard against which to measure the success of LLL policies can be problematic given that European labour markets increasingly create diversified and uncertain pathways into and within the employment system and, thus, lead to more age variability in occupational and private transitions.

Analysis of Finnish LLL policy documents indicates that there is a desire and commitment to develop education and services in order to better support young people and their career paths. At the same time, there has been a shift from a structural towards an individualising policy approach (see Pohl and Walther, 2007). Young people themselves are expected to take active responsibility for their employability and civic participation. Sanctions are a common element of employment policies targeting young people in vulnerable situations. In fact, many of the measures to reduce youth unemployment are not targeted at unemployment – they are targeted at the unemployed. Giving employers the option of paying young workers a lower wage than those defined in collective agreements is one of the most discussed topics in the current discourse on youth unemployment. No minimum wage is defined by Finnish legislation. Instead, minimum wages are defined in the collective agreements of each industry. According to the government, Germany offers a good example, having succeeded in reducing unemployment through low-waged work. Low-paid work is seen as a solution, especially for poorly educated young people. Gratuitous social security and inactivity traps are seen as obstacles to accepting low-paid temporary work.

The analysis shows that national-level experts particularly are aware of the realities of society. Their experiences and opinions of the LLL policies appear more sceptical, and they acknowledge that the ideology and aims of policy documents are often far removed from the reality of the young people's lives. The main challenges were more frequently related to young adults' difficult economic situations, as well as the polarisation of educational opportunities and labour market possibilities. For those young adults in disadvantaged situations,

approximately 20 per cent of the entire group, it was also challenging to remain hopeful and believe in one's future possibilities. They did not see, however, their difficulties as stemming from structural constraints, but instead from their personal characteristics such as a lack of motivation or difficulties in doing well in school.

One important aspect omitted from policy texts is class structure and the different life opportunities available to different social classes. After the Second World War particularly, Finland experienced a period of growing equality during which class differences decreased as the number of white-collar jobs and middle-class positions increased significantly. For a long time, the development of the Finnish welfare state could be described using rising graphs and increasing numbers. The range of services expanded, while budgets and the number of service users increased. Economic growth made extensive well-being services possible, and in turn, public services supported further growth. A comprehensive social security system was built to cover temporary gaps in employment income. Social assistance provided by municipalities was intended as a last resort to ensure income security.

In the 1990s, the trend began to change. At the same time as inequalities between social classes began to increase after the recession of the early 1990s, neoliberal arguments were mobilised to create a doctrine around this change. The relationship between society and the individual was redefined. At the core of the new doctrine was the individual, now responsible for ensuring their own well-being without help in the form of transfer payments. The new morality rejects gratuitous social benefits for the unemployed. Neoliberal governing of institutions and populations tightens competition for decent jobs, decent pay and decent social standing, even at the lower levels of the social hierarchy among the 'vulnerable'.

Naturally, one cannot simply generalise the Finnish situation to a broader European context. The Finnish case has its own strong historical and social roots, and a vision of education as the great equaliser seems to still be alive in Finland, at least in the rhetoric of policy documents. On the other hand, the political decisions, and the experiences and opinions of both young adults and experts examined in this study, demonstrate that the reality is often bleaker than the promises made in policy documents.

Note

1   These include the Finnish government, the Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish National Board of Education, Centre for Economic Development,

Transport and the Environment of South-west Finland, Regional Council of South-west Finland, Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment of Kainuu, Regional Council of Kainuu and Kainuu Social Welfare and Health Care Joint Authority.

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Tackling vulnerability through lifelong learning policies?

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The development of social assistance systems in Europe throughout the 20th century was characterised by a high level of welfare protection that guaranteed support for different groups in society, especially those deemed at risk (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999). The basis for this was the significant economic growth achieved in the 20th century, which has allowed the necessary institutional mechanisms to ensure a reasonable standard of living for a large number of European citizens to be created. Social assistance systems aim at tackling key risk points in people's lives: unemployment, disease and disability (physical and mental), old age. The new century is characterised by rising risks (Beck, 1992) and has turned uncertainty and instability into basic characteristics of society. Confidence in one's ability to control risks has been replaced by the belief that risks are not fully predictable and controllable (Beck, 1992). In this sense, as Piketty wrote:

> A market economy based on private property, if left to itself, contains powerful forces of convergence, associated in particular with the diffusion of knowledge and skills; but it also contains powerful forces of divergence, which are potentially threatening to democratic societies and to the values of social justice on which they are based. (Piketty, 2014: 398)

Skills, competences and qualifications are important values for individuals in our market-based economy. Lifelong learning (LLL) policies play an important role in this system. Persons and groups that are targeted by these policies are increasingly described as 'vulnerable'. The concept of vulnerability becomes central in European policy debates and the term itself is used in an inflationary fashion.

This chapter aims to show how LLL policies address vulnerability today. To do so we first discuss the concept of vulnerability, showing

how this term is misused when operationalised in the field of LLL and highlighting that our understanding of vulnerability is a social-relational one. In the second section, we present groups of people who often find themselves in vulnerable circumstances and identify poverty and social exclusion as key aspects of those situations. By referring to European statistics, we show that contemporary European societies are facing a growing phenomenon: an increase in the prerequisites for vulnerability. To show how vulnerability is addressed today, we refer to three European countries in contrasting situations and which are facing different issues:

- Germany, as an example of a highly institutionalised and economically successful European country;
- Portugal, as an example of a relatively sustainable traditional economy;
- Bulgaria, as an example of a country experiencing a high degree of poverty and ethnic distance.

In sum, we show different ways of addressing vulnerability and identify employability as the overarching aim of LLL policies that attempt to tackle vulnerability.

Vulnerability as a social-relational issue

According to Heidegger (1996), humans are thrown into the world, which is to say we find ourselves delivered over to a world. This exposure provides us with an image of the general vulnerability of human beings. Vulnerability derives from the Latin (*vulnerare* = to wound, injure). Developing this image, two sources of vulnerability can be differentiated: vulnerability to nature and vulnerability to human society. The former refers to natural disasters and their consequences, such as famine (Delor and Hubert, 2000), which are scientifically elucidated, for example by disaster risk management (Vatsa, 2004). In these studies 'vulnerability is the key factor which explains how the outcome of a risky event is distributed across households' (Vatsa, 2004: 9). In contexts of LLL, the second aspect – vulnerability to society – is the more dominant issue in our modern societies. In the field of LLL, varying terms are used to describe and categorise persons or groups of people. People are 'at risk', suffer from 'social disadvantage', are 'near social exclusion' or are described as 'vulnerable'. These terms – used in the field of LLL and in public discussions – are defined and established by social sciences. The term vulnerable is especially used in poverty/

social exclusion research, indicating persons or groups who are worthy of protection or face higher levels of exposure to poverty or welfare losses (Alwang et al, 2001; Luna, 2009).

Another differentiation of vulnerability was presented within the taxonomy of vulnerability developed by Mackenzie and colleagues (2014). They distinguish *inherent* from *situational* vulnerability: 'Inherent vulnerability refers to sources of vulnerability that are intrinsic to human conditions', such as hunger, thirst or physical harm (Mackenzie et al, 2014: 7). To cope with these inherent vulnerabilities, the capacities of the individuals to meet their needs are central. Situational vulnerability is the second source mentioned by Mackenzie and colleagues. These vulnerabilities are context–specific: 'This may be caused or exacerbated by the personal, social, political, economic, or environmental situations of individuals or social groups' (Mackenzie et al, 2014: 7). They could be short-term, intermittent or enduring (Mackenzie et al, 2014: 7). Mackenzie and colleagues' situational vulnerability comes closest to the image of exposedness that Heidegger evokes with his term of 'thrownness' (Heidegger, 1996) and highlights at the same time that different kinds of vulnerable situations are related to the societal context. Thus, vulnerability is also constituted by different 'layers' of social interactions and contexts, rather than one solid form of vulnerability that transcends all circumstances. In other words, a person is not vulnerable but is rendered or made vulnerable by certain situations and thus may be simultaneously vulnerable, highly vulnerable or not vulnerable depending on the situation and context (Delor and Hubert, 2000; Luna, 2009; Scandurra et al, 2017).

In scientific discourses it is nowadays widely accepted that all these concepts – at risk, social disadvantage, near social exclusion and vulnerability – are dynamic processes and not inherent characteristics of persons or groups. When examining the work of Castel – *Les Métamorphoses de la question sociale* (1995) – it becomes more and more evident that these concepts cannot be understand as static, natural or individual attributes. Castel presents a model of social exclusion, which divides the social sphere into three zones of integration: the *integration zone*, incorporating people who have a secure job and a solid social network; the *zone of vulnerability* (*la zone de vulnérabilité*), including, for example, those whose job is not secure or who have unstable social relationships with little social support; and finally, the *exclusion zone* in which we find people that have been 'shaken off' (from the labour market, educational participation etc). It becomes obvious that people are able to change/slip from one zone to another depending on their

current situation. Here again it is context that acts as the crucial factor and not the 'characteristics' of the individuals or groups.

This implies, therefore, that anyone could become vulnerable, in the sense of finding themselves in a vulnerable situation, as Levine and colleagues (2004: 46) also discuss: 'So many categories of people are now considered vulnerable that virtually all potential human subjects are included.' In our view, this does not mean that the concept of vulnerability is diluted. It highlights instead the dynamic of ongoing processes, especially in times of individualisation, flexibilisation and de-standardisation of life courses. In this sense, we understand vulnerability as a social–relational issue (see also Scandurra et al, 2017: 10).

While such an understanding makes sense at a theoretical level, it seems difficult to realise in daily practice. One reason could be that identification of particular attributes of people in vulnerable positions makes it easier to define target groups, operationalise theoretical concepts and build capacity for action. It seems that rendering the concept of vulnerability manageable on-site risks essentialising attributions as static and 'natural'. As a consequence, the status quo of dynamic processes are used as labels and characteristics of persons or groups, which leads to phenomena such as 'blaming the victim' (Ryan, 1971) and 'Group-Focused Enmity' (Zick et al, 2008), obscuring focus on the cause of the problems.

Nowadays the concept of vulnerability is central to European policy debates concerning the prevention of social exclusion among different populations. Vulnerability as a social–relational issue occurs and develops in the economic, demographic and political spheres, and in conditions of uncertainty related to the material environment and unstable local economy and institutions; underdeveloped market relations being characterised by a high degree of fluctuation. In this sense, vulnerability and uncertainty arising from different risks in society are interrelated.

Depending on the situations people are 'thrown into', uncertainty and risks act differently on them and thus, they are differently affected by vulnerability. The concept of vulnerability demonstrates how the effects of risk spread to different groups and the extent of their impact on the risk factor (Vatsa, 2004). Vulnerability is a state of susceptibility in a certain situation to the action of a given risk. Therefore, it can be said that the notion of social vulnerability identifies not only specific risk profiles, but also the nature of the risks themselves (Castel, 1995).

The state of uncertainty is frequently experienced by young adults and characterised by several key features, including the fact that they are at the beginning of their working lives and often face difficulties

in the transition from education to work and the labour market. The labour market is one of the principle mechanisms for the distribution of social resources and, therefore, is crucial for the lives of individuals. Young adults are often subject to job insecurity, which affects income and thus the opportunity to invest in education and careers. They often change jobs and move to other cities and countries due to staff rotation or company relocations. There are several peculiarities in the temporary employment of a large proportion of young adults that relate to job insecurity:

- Labour relations are short-term and therefore labour protection is weak.
- The employed person cannot influence the work situation and is poorly integrated into the company.
- The employed person has little or no social and legal protection.
- Job insecurity occurs both in the service sector with a low maintenance level as well as in highly qualified and professionalised sectors, which leads to the polarisation of the labour market and affects social groups traditionally considered to be protected against the risks of temporary employment.

The positioning of young adults between the labour market, the family and the social system (Taylor-Gooby, 2004) heightens the need for responsibility and care in the early phases of family life, cooperation between members of the family and intergenerational support.

   Social assistance systems do not offer protection to all groups at risk (Taylor-Gooby, 2004); or if they offer such benefits, they are insufficient to ensure a normal level of well-being. Thus, a situation is being created at the intersection of several processes: insecure income and unstable workplaces, as well as unstable family support that social protection systems cannot handle (Lash and Urry, 1987). It is therefore hardly surprising that the years since the 1980s have been marked by increasing job insecurity and a sharp increase in the prerequisites for vulnerable situations, particularly for young adults.

Groups in vulnerable positions

In the previous section we highlighted the social-relational nature of vulnerability and outlined the dynamic and non-essentialistic character of the (social scientific) concept. We also highlighted the difficulty of implementing this insight in daily practice. Various major and decisive actors at the international level, such the European Court for

Human Rights,[1] the Council of Europe[2] and even Eurostat,[3] speak of vulnerable groups and perpetuate misleading terminology, turning the status quo of dynamic processes into static attributions and societal situations into the characteristics of a person or group.

On the basis of their different categorisations, we can produce an integrated classification to identify recurring groups described by these sources: people in poverty and social exclusion; unemployed people; ethnic minorities; disabled people; groups with minority sexual orientations; migrants and refugees.

All of these groups share a common societal situation – their risk of social exclusion – which is often perceived and communicated as exclusion from the labour market:

> Social exclusion is a process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competences and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination. This distances them from job, income and education opportunities, as well as social and community networks and activities. They have little access to power and decision-making bodies, and thus often feeling powerless and unable to take control over the decisions that affect their day to day lives.[4]

Poverty and social exclusion seem to be the most prominent categories for characterising situations of vulnerability. To elucidate the current situation in Europe we focus now on these central phenomena.

Poverty and social exclusion

Poverty and social exclusion are complex phenomena with multiple manifestations. They concern not only people's income and material well-being but also possibilities for their active participation in society. Poverty becomes a key characteristic of vulnerability. The poverty level is in direct correlation with levels of socioeconomic inequalities, which in turn are some of the main factors influencing the deepening of poverty.

The European Union (EU) uses a relative definition of poverty, set out in 2004:

> People are said to be living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living considered acceptable in the society

in which they live. Because of their poverty they may experience multiple disadvantages through unemployment, low income, poor housing, inadequate health care and barriers to lifelong learning, culture, sport and recreation. They are often excluded and marginalised from participating in activities (economic, social and cultural) that are the norm for other people and their access to fundamental rights may be restricted.[5]

Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon, and it includes both a lack of resources to satisfy basic needs and a lack of conditions and prerequisites for a decent and fulfilling life, which in turn is due to a lack of possible choices. People in a disadvantaged position both inside and outside the labour market are at greatest risk of falling into poverty. Examples of people typically in these positions are unemployed youths up to 29 years of age, the long-term unemployed and ethnic minorities.

Despite EU targets to reduce the number of people experiencing poverty or social exclusion by 20 million before 2020, the number of people at risk of poverty has increased from 116 million in 2008 (23.8 per cent) to 122 million in 2014, representing 24.4 per cent of the population (EU-28) (Lecerf, 2016: 5).

In 2014, more than a third of the population was 'at risk of poverty or social exclusion' (Lecerf, 2016: 5) in three member states: Romania (40.2 per cent), Bulgaria (40.1 per cent) and Greece (36 per cent). At the opposite end of the scale, the lowest share of those at risk of poverty or social exclusion was recorded in the Czech Republic (14.8 per cent), Sweden (16.9 per cent) and the Netherlands (17.1 per cent) (Lecerf, 2016: 5). Data show a marked increase in the risk of poverty and social exclusion for the period 2008–2014 (Figure 7.1): in Greece (+7.9 per cent), Spain (+4.7 per cent), Cyprus (+4.1 per cent), Malta (+ 3.7 per cent), Hungary (+ 2.9 per cent) and Italy (+ 2.8 per cent) (Lecerf, 2016: 5).

In addition, it can also be said that the risk of poverty and social exclusion is greatest among young adults (18–24) in the context of EU member states (Lecerf, 2016: 6), as shown in Figure 7.2.

Muffels and Fouarge (2004) claim that the number of people affected by temporary poverty is much greater than those in a state of constant poverty. Another dimension of poverty is the number of people in Europe who live slightly above the standard poverty line. According to Forster and d'Ercole (2005), roughly 6 per cent of the European population has an income of between 50 per cent and 60 per cent of the average, while 10.6 per cent live on less than 50 per cent of

Figure 7.1: The share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2008 (EU-27) and 2014 (EU-28)
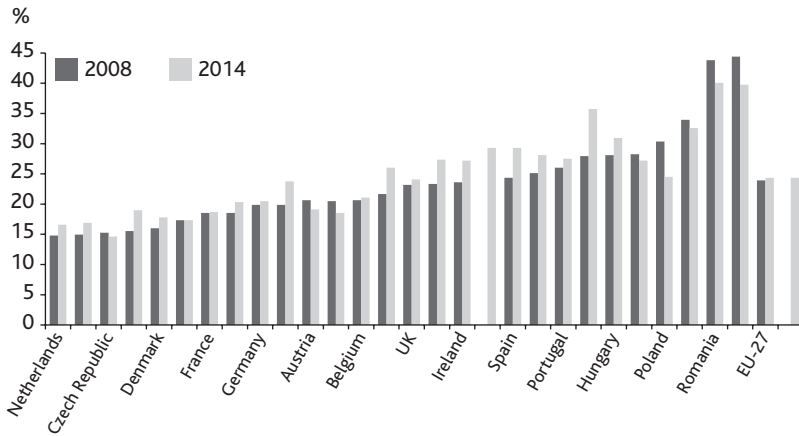
Source: Lecerf, 2016, p 5

Figure 7.2: The share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2008 (EU-27) and 2014 (EU-28) by age
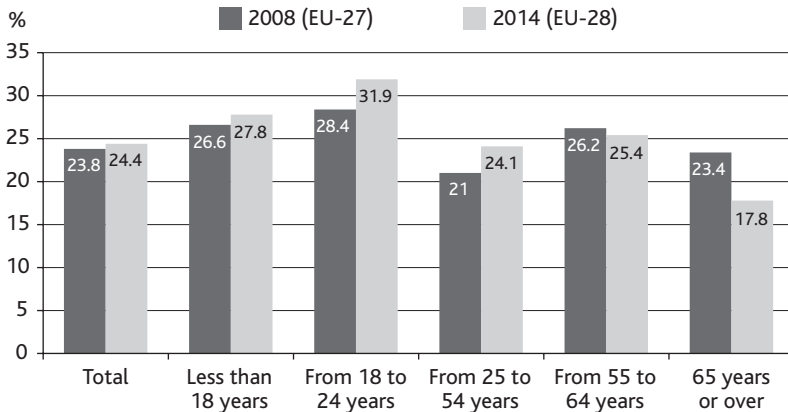
Source: Lecerf, 2016, p 6

the average threshold for available income. The result is an aggregate of people who are economically unstable and make up more than 50 per cent of Europe's population. Income instability is a way of life characterised by economic discomfort, reduced living standards and hardship. Poverty leads to poor living conditions, unhealthy environments, frequent births, inadequate health culture, lack of family planning skills, limited access to health and medical services and much more.

Policies for overcoming vulnerability

After further developing the concept of vulnerability – referring to groups of people who frequently have to cope with vulnerable situations – and presenting figures that show the increasing importance of tackling vulnerable situations, we focus on LLL policies that address this issue and try to overcome vulnerability in their domains of activity. We focus on three countries in very different circumstances: Germany, Portugal and Bulgaria.

Policies tackling vulnerabilities? The case of Germany

As opposed to other countries such as Bulgaria (see later section), German LLL policies do not employ the term 'lifelong learning' in their titles and it is seldom used in general. Nonetheless, the field of LLL policies is highly differentiated and diverse. The mapping process conducted as part of the YOUNG_ADULLLT project (Bittlingmayer et al, 2016) rendered visible the scope and range of policies in this field. Labour market policies, social and youth policies and education policies were the most commonly occurring. In the case of Germany, we notice that the conceptual differences between these three policy fields are difficult to maintain. LLL remains implicit and is understood as a cross-sectional task spanning the aforementioned fields. One reason for this is the German vocational education and training (VET) system, which includes a blend of school- and company-based training. Another reason is the general activation paradigm that pervades the whole system and blurs the distinctions between different fields.

The support system for young adults in Germany is highly institutionalised and the number of actors and measures is so significant that critics speak of a 'jungle of measures' (*Maßnahmedschungel*) (Leisering and Rolff, 2011). If we take a step back, as we did in YOUNG_ADULLLT, we see that all these actors and measures form a dense, functionally differentiated system in which all individual policies are interrelated, only realising their full potential in combination with each other in order to sustainably tackle vulnerability.

From a macro perspective, we clearly identify a network of policies, which are located at different levels, with different corresponding ways to tackle vulnerability (see Verlage et al, 2017). The breadth of policies seems to be comprehensive. Some provide direct access while those at the lower levels are aimed at providing required prerequisites. There are policies that address the basic, sometimes even existential, needs of young adults. There are policies that aim to compensate

for individual deficits, which are seen as barriers to training or employment. In addition, there are policies that provide regular qualifications, whether in the form of a school-leaving qualifications or a completed apprenticeship. Policies at all these different levels share the overarching intention of tackling vulnerability in terms of employability and independence through standard employment.

Our analysis of the governance of the German LLL system (Weiler et al, 2017) suggests that it can be described as a 'loose coupling' of involved actors. We see a dense mesh of actors, measures and cooperation as well as locations and opportunities for contact. The system works without a central actor that oversees the whole system. Instead all participating actors work with a relatively high degree of independence, pursuing their own interests or their public mandate. The aim each actor has to fulfil (with regard to cooperation) is the result of a common process; this, of course, does not mean that these processes are democratic or free of hierarchy.

While this analysis appears valid for Germany in general, there are differences in the prioritisation and implementation of measures and projects according to local/regional conditions and needs. While in the Rhein–Main region, an economically strong and growing area, situations of vulnerability emerge because of employers' skill requirements or extremely high rents, the Bremen region faces different, dynamic changes in its structure due to lower economic strength and demographic trends in the region.

In the following, we present two exemplary measures that tackle vulnerability at the local level to reveal commonalities and differences. The first initiative is offered by the Centre for Further Education (Zentrum für Weiterbildung) – an independent service provider – and is called 'Perspective with a Plan' (PmP). The finding that young people who depend on social benefits often experience multiple problems at the same time forms the background to this measure. This plurality of problems can inhibit the search for a job or a VET placement, preventing access to the labour market. PmP provides individual, bespoke advice and support to young people aged 16 to 26, and it is commissioned and funded by the city of Frankfurt and the Jobcentre. Thus, the concrete support the measure offers depends on the needs of the young person in question. Possible interventions are: individual support for coping with everyday life; group training; competence training; stabilisation; guidance; clarification of circumstances; initiation of assistance measures; long-term, intense social-pedagogical support at the process of transition into vocational training, further education or work; and the development of personal

and professional perspectives. Vulnerability, according to this policy, is understood as a coalescence of challenging circumstances in which young people are entangled and which prevent their labour market participation. Behind the social–pedagogical intervention lies the assumption – drawing parallels with Castel's work – that shifting from a zone of vulnerability to a zone of integration is possible if individual bespoke support is offered. One quotation from a young participant supports this assumption: 'It is complex. I have a lot of wishes, but I don't know how to realise them or even if I should realize them. I have to work on a lot of issues and I don't know how to prioritise. I am still confused, that's why this is a big help' (young adult, Rhein-Main, male, Y_GER_F_1).

The second example is the VbFF (Verein zur beruflichen Förderung von Frauen/Association for the Professional Development of Women), whose initiative is an example of a policy that aims to help young adults gain qualifications. It is an independent service provider with a focus on training and professional development aimed primarily at women. The organisation was founded in 1978 in Frankfurt am Main, has its roots in the women's movement and still holds to a feminist perspective. It offers 30 hours per week of part-time vocational training for single mothers. The VbFF cooperates with companies and supports single mothers in coping with the challenges of childcare during vocational training (based in companies and professional schools), as well as with different social problems. The vocational training takes place on site at the collaborating companies and at the VbFF itself, where they organise childcare, specialised teaching and exam preparation. One staff member outlined the objective of the measure: 'On the one hand of course, the women get an official apprenticeship and become financially independent from the welfare office and from their husbands. So they can live their lives independently from any other factors. That is the primary goal. The next goal is that they grow personally' (expert, Rhein-Main, E_GER_F_2). They target single mothers under 26 who live in Frankfurt and have a school-leaving qualification (for more details see Verlage et al, 2018). Vulnerability in this policy refers to gender (female) and a temporary situation (young mothers with dependent children). Here, vulnerability is tackled with a combination of social–pedagogical support – which could be interpreted as an individualising approach – and situation–changing offers (childcare) that tackle the situation instead of the individual.

After reflecting upon the case of an economically successful and highly institutionalised country, we turn to a country with a relatively

sustainable economy and traditions, which is also rather under-institutionalised: Portugal.

Policies tackling vulnerabilities? The case of Portugal

In the wake of a dictatorship that lasted almost 50 years, Portugal was a country characterised by low economic capacity, widespread poverty and illiteracy. This period ended with the revolution of April 1974 and, since then, great efforts have been made in order to reduce poverty and social inequalities, enhance economic growth and increase educational standards. Social security policies have been implemented alongside universal public health and educational systems, dramatically raising the population's general well-being (Alves et al, 2016).

In 1986, Portugal joined the European Economic Community and started modernising its public administration system and its communication, transport and, to a lesser degree, agricultural and industrial infrastructures. In Portugal in the 1990s and early 2000s, there was huge investment in real estate and construction, leading to a great intensification of immigration. This was also a period defined by great growth in educational qualifications and socioeconomic well-being. Although this led to an expansion of the tertiary sector labour market, Portugal still faced a limited capacity for generating employment (Alves et al, 2016).

In spite of this global and quite significant growth, in the early 2010s Portugal still lagged behind EU and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average standards in educational, social and economic terms. This became even more evident following the severe austerity measures imposed by the 2011 bailout plan. In Portugal, the impact of the crisis and austerity measures on unemployment was significant and far-reaching, although the impact was greatest among the younger population. The most dramatic period was between 2012 and 2014, when more than one third of active youngsters under 25 were unemployed, leading to an increase in the number of those defined as NEET (not in education, employment or training) (Alves et al, 2016). The situational nature of widespread vulnerability became particularly evident during this period.

Portugal, like most southern European countries such as Spain, Greece and Italy, plunged into a major economic and financial crisis, beginning in 2008 and reaching its peak in 2014. As a result, there was a joint EU and International Monetary Fund intervention and austerity measures were implemented in the country to reduce public debt and stimulate economic growth. These measures resulted in

moderation in the use of public money, the limitation of social policies, a reduction in public administration posts, lowered wages and raised taxes. However, while attempts were made to foster economic growth, these measures resulted in a reduction of families' financial capacity and increasing unemployment and job instability (Sarmento et al, 2015).

During this period, Portugal experienced the worst economic crisis of its democratic life, registering high levels of unemployment, which deeply affected families. According to a study by Ribeiro and colleagues (2015), families faced new challenges such as indebtedness, changes in family income and changes in their daily practices. According to the authors, this crisis had a 'particularly negative psychosocial impact on families with lower incomes', as these families had more difficulties adjusting or reducing their already low expenses (Ribeiro et al, 2015: 5166).

Even given such a negative set of indicators, and taking into account the fact that they have not yet reached average European standards, levels of educational attainment have been consistently rising in Portugal. This growth is the result of a set of policies that are currently in place nationwide. In Portugal, LLL policies have a national, rather than regional, scope, and most of these policies reflect three principle concerns: the consolidation and growth of the academic and qualification levels of the Portuguese population in general, and young adults in particular; combating unemployment (especially youth unemployment); and tackling social exclusion (Alves et al, 2016).

Currently, in Portugal, the greater challenge that young adults face is 'finding a job' (expert, Vale do Ave, WP6_PT_VdA_1), and this is usually due to their lack and/or inadequacy of skills, given that 'many of the young adults do not have adequate training' (expert, Vale do Ave, WP6_PT_VdA_1). Although it is expected that a 'young adult's first job is often precarious' (expert, Vale do Ave, WP6_PT_VdA_1), many will have to deal with job insecurity and/or structural unemployment throughout their lives (see also Ribeiro et al, 2017).

Against this backdrop, we present one policy (out of many) that aims at tackling vulnerabilities in Portugal: Contrato Local de Desenvolvimento Social (CLDS; Local Contract of Social Development), which was created as a response to the economic and social situation produced by the crisis and the consequent growth of social inequalities that have led to increased instances of social exclusion.

CLDS seeks to promote the social inclusion of citizens living in persistent poverty and experiencing social exclusion in deprived areas. The target group of the CDLS intervention are 'the unemployed young

adults and adults, the beneficiaries of the Social Integration Income [a type of minimum guaranteed income for the severely dispossessed] or young people with difficulties of school integration, therefore, […] a fringe of the population that, effectively, needs intervention' (expert, Vale do Ave, E_PT_VdA_2). CLDS aims to strengthen the proactivity of all agents in the search for solutions to the different issues affecting citizens, and to promote sustainable and inclusive growth of the territories with a special focus on employment. CLDS projects are structured around a concentration of resources in crucial areas of intervention, such as employment, training and qualifications, measures in support of families and parents, community and institutional empowerment, and information and accessibility. The professionals involved work according to a logic of 'networking, joining efforts and resources, and CDLS is a kind of a booster' (expert, Vale do Ave, E_PT_VdA_2). Nevertheless, while this networking demonstrates a positive impact, this expert also recognises that at times 'it is difficult to articulate and to understand the logics of network functioning without being intrusive, because our goal is not to intrude, but rather to activate and to enhance' (expert, Vale do Ave, E_PT_VdA_2) (see also Rodrigues et al, 2017). The policy is expected to contribute to enhancing the local and regional economies and generating new, sustainable and lasting jobs. It includes cooperational approaches that especially target individuals' situations, but the individualised approach of tackling vulnerability remains dominant.

This exemplar policy selects leveraging employability, or supporting all factors that lead to employability, as the method of choice to support individuals' shift from a zone of vulnerability to the integration zone.

Our third case was chosen to maximise the contrast within our sample. Bulgaria is one of the youngest EU members and faces a high degree of poverty and ethnic distance, which, at first glance, paints a picture of extended vulnerability.

Policies tackling vulnerabilities? The case of Bulgaria

In recent years, in Bulgaria, a series of policies and measures have been introduced aimed at reducing the dropout rate in primary schools, stimulating continuous education and increasing the opportunities for marginalised communities to participate in social and economic life.

A significant step forward in the development of the Bulgarian education system is an eagerness to implement good practices from the global LLL experience. Roma inclusion policies seek to modernise

the training system through enhancing the responsibilities of all actors implicated in the process. In line with this, consistent educational policies are regularly reinitiated given that so far these instruments have largely been coordinated and resourceful.

There are few policy documents outlining the conditions of Bulgarian LLL (Boyadjieva et al, 2013; Milenkova and Apostolov, 2018). From 2005 to 2015, three strategies have been adopted:

- *The National Strategy for Continuing Vocational Training* (2005–10), which aimed to optimise conditions for those in the workforce to obtain vocational qualifications.
- *The National Strategy for Lifelong Learning* (2008–13), which outlined measures at all educational levels, including adult education, with respect to disadvantaged groups and people aged 55 and over.
- *The National Strategy for Lifelong Learning* (2014–20), which has a leading role in providing the legal conditions for the implementation of LLL policies focusing on groups in vulnerable situations.

Currently, the dynamics of social events and the rapid alteration of agendas have led to demands for more flexible and adaptable policy solutions to educational inequality (with a focus on Roma communities), including the need for a greater diversity of initiatives to be enacted. The following policies appear to encompass the whole range of approaches used to tackle vulnerability. Some policies focus on social-pedagogical guidance for young people in vulnerable situations. Others try to improve the cognitive skills and qualifications of this group and shift individuals from the zone of vulnerability to the integration zone:

- *National Strategy for Reduction of Early School Leaving* (2013–20), aimed at reducing the share of early school leavers to less than 11 per cent using the governmental budget and structural funds. The strategy is in line with measures designed to improve access and quality of education oriented mainly to Roma youth.
- *National Strategy to Promote and Improve Literacy Skills* (2014–20), aimed at creating a knowledge society in which literacy is central to individual and social development and is the basis for smart growth. The measures include conducting courses in literacy, information campaigns and validation of prior non-formal and informal learning. The strategy entails overcoming the low literacy rates among certain groups where poverty and poor command of the official language serve as major barriers to acquiring a diploma.

- *Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities* (2015–20). The strategy includes the following activities: working with parents to ensure greater interest in and commitment to education; attracting minority ethnic young people with higher education to the teaching profession; providing additional qualifications for pedagogical specialists to work in multicultural educational environments; conducting extracurricular work linked to the traditions of various ethnic groups; supporting students from ethnic communities towards continued education after compulsory school age; and the dissemination of good practices for the preservation and promotion of ethnic communities' cultural traditions through modern technologies.

The implementation of LLL policies at the regional level takes the form of various programmes aimed at creating paths to the labour market for youth, especially those in vulnerable positions. Such a policy is the 'National Youth Guarantee Scheme',[6] which aims to provide: career guidance for young people; training in vocational qualifications or key competences; subsidies for temporary work; assistance to employers to create new jobs; support for youth entrepreneurship; and provision of services from the European Employment Services (EURES) network (the European job mobility portal). The objective of the programme is to support unemployed young people under 29 to achieve their personal goals and labour market integration. Young people can register through labour offices with the assistance of labour mediators. The policy primarily makes use of training, internships and so on, in line with local needs. According to the experts: 'Precisely because including these young people in any kind of activity, whether it is a course, qualification or internship has a positive effect for them and for their families and for the regional economy' (expert, Blagoevgrad, E_BG_B_7).

Due to the centralised policy approach, public programmes targeting groups in vulnerable positions are implemented identically in both functional regions – Plovdiv and Blagoevgrad. From this perspective, it is not so much the regional differences in implementation of the 'Youth Guarantee' policy that are significant, as the regionalised views of experts and young adults themselves.

Young adults in both regions describe various difficulties related to the labour market. They 'face high job insecurity working informally, without labour contracts, and quickly switching from one job to the other' (Kovacheva et al, 2017: 31). 'It is difficult to find a job to ensure a normal life. Employers usually pay low wages and this marginalises

young people' (young adult, Blagoevgrad, female, Y_BG_B_5). 'Like any normal person, I want to build a family, but I just do not know […] whether I will handle the costs. I have to raise a child. This is something that actually stops me from thinking about these things' (young adult, Plovdiv, male, Y_BG_P_2). In this respect, 'Youth Guarantee' represents an opportunity to address critical points in the life course related to an individual's job search. Young people 'gain confidence when participating in the project, especially when they work on what they want and what they have learned' (expert, Plovdiv, E_BG_P_1).

According to experts, the meaning of the programme 'is crucial because it is related to providing employment, income, and hence a better quality of life. Increasing employment is a key to reducing poverty and social exclusion; people feel more engaged in the social environment and feel part of it' (expert, Blagoevgrad, E_BG_B_7).

However, the implementation of 'Youth Guarantee' policy in both regions has come up against a number of difficulties:

- The need to adapt the education and training system to the labour market.
- Employers' high expectations of the skills, qualifications and experience of youth.
- Insufficient coordination between universities and business organisations.
- The lack of altered outcomes *after completing* the programme – most young participants remain out of work.

Successful implementation of the *reviewed policies* requires more investment and effort to improve the efficiency of local labour markets and to promote economic activity. Local needs are reflected through the active involvement of regional businesses to increase employment, thus meeting the needs and requirements of local stakeholders.

Conclusion

Several important conclusions can be drawn. Risk factors are at the root of vulnerability as they relate to creating unfavourable circumstances in people's daily lives and life courses. The dimensions of vulnerability are associated with the loss of permanent employment and a lack of secure income. Changes in the labour market and an increase in temporary employment have weakened social protection mechanisms and – mediated by the professional position of individuals – have led

in many cases to poverty and social exclusion, as well as the disruption of links among the labour market, domestic organisation and public welfare. Vulnerability affects areas of public life that are considered as private spheres and which are important for the implementation of social policies. People's involvement in different systems for the distribution of public resources makes it possible, in the event of a crisis, to mobilise compensatory mechanisms and gather resources. At the same time, this allows the coordination of different resource allocation mechanisms, supports social systems to respond to new forms of social vulnerability and enables current systems to adapt to ongoing social and economic changes.

Poverty is a major feature of vulnerability. The high level of poverty among the unemployed shows that a lack of employment is one of the main causes of poverty and social exclusion. Most EU countries are experiencing increasing income inequality. Data shows that income distribution is significantly more uneven than before (OECD, 2014), leading to the question: Can LLL policies address poverty and social exclusion?

This is certainly a great challenge, but the examples of our chosen European countries suggest that the way to overcome poverty is by shifting as many people as possible into the zone of integration. This could be achieved by expanding the opportunities for people in vulnerable situations (especially the unemployed, the poorly educated and the unqualified) through the formation of skills and qualifications. In the different countries examined in this chapter, various configurations of approaches were identified. In Germany, where the impact of the financial crisis was the least pronounced of our sample, employability is the clear vanishing point of its highly institutionalised support system. A system of policies is implemented to guide clients step by step towards this ultimate goal. In Portugal, we observed that LLL policies are often directly aimed at labour market integration. The primacy of business and labour market integration seems to be consistent at a time when the country is coping with the effects of the financial crisis. As a result, the main orientation of LLL policies in Portugal can be understood as a consequence of the financial crisis and its huge impacts on Portuguese society. In contrast, LLL policies in Bulgaria are adaptations of worldwide LLL best practices, and represent an attempt to establish a diverse landscape of LLL programmes, with a particular focus on ethnic minorities who are identified as being in vulnerable circumstances.

In all of the analysed countries, employability is the overarching aim of these policy initiatives. Under the banner of this common aim, we

observed different approaches to tackling vulnerability through LLL policies. We identified social-pedagogical interventions that try to strengthen individuals' ability to cope with their vulnerable situations and to guide them from the zone of vulnerability to the integration zone. It should be noted that for this approach, the principle aim remains employability as a means to overcome vulnerable situations. Therefore, employability is the dominant theme of LLL policies that support young adults to cope with vulnerable situations. To a lesser extent we also find policies that try to change the environmental conditions of young adults and transform their situations in this way from vulnerable to not-vulnerable. In some cases both approaches are combined.

However, we also find policies that address groups of people as carriers of the attributed characteristics. The fear is that in these cases, people in vulnerable circumstances do not receive individual, needs-based support. It is necessary to be aware of the essentialistic attributions that are still used in the field of LLL in order to strengthen the heuristic capacity and practical relevance of vulnerability as a social scientific concept. This is crucial if we are to better support young adults and other people in vulnerable situations

Notes

[1] The European Court of Human Rights: http://njb.nl/Uploads/2015/9/Thesis-The-protection-of-vulnerable-groups-and-individuals-by-the-European-Court-of-Human-Rights.pdf

[2] Vulnerable groups according to the Council of Europe: https://www.coe.int/en/web/europarisks/vulnerable-groups

[3] Eurostat (2016): https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion

[4] Joint report by the Commission and the Council on social inclusion, Council of the EU, March 2004, p 10, http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/joint_rep_en.htm

[5] Joint report by the Commission and the Council on social inclusion, Council of the EU, March 2004, p 10, http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/joint_rep_en.htm

[6] The scheme started in 2014 and it has facilitated structural reforms and innovation in policy design across EU member states ever since. It is a commitment among all member states that aims to ensure that all young people under 25 receive qualitative job offers or continuing training. The member states an voluntarily increase the age limit to 29 years and Bulgaria has taken this decision.

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Are lifelong learning policies working for youth? Young people's voices

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Introduction

In the aftermath of the global recession in the early 21st century the trend towards rising insecurity in both education and work has rendered the relationship between school leavers' credentials and their labour market integration more complex than ever before. Policy responses focused on increasing the intensity, although not always the offer, of various lifelong learning (LLL) schemes and initiatives (Walther et al, 2016; Butler and Muir, 2017). The trend towards activation in welfare and learning is most consistently targeted towards young people, and is premised on policy makers' implicit perception that young people lack the motivation as well as knowledge and skills that would make them employable. Given the lack of a more holistic understanding of young people's needs and resources in their life course transitions in many countries, apprenticeships have been hailed as 'the magic bullet' against youth unemployment (Raffe, 2011).

  LLL policy programmes and initiatives at the national and local level rarely begin by investigating the needs and aspirations of young participants, and even less opportunities are provided for young people to participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of policy interventions. In this chapter we attempt to highlight the views of young recipients on how effectively policies support their personal life projects, educational and professional aspirations and, more broadly, their need for empowerment in the transition to adulthood. This chapter also presents young adults' perspectives on their participation in LLL policies. The role of LLL programmes and measures in shaping young adults' life trajectories is best captured at one of the most pivotal turning points in their lives – the transition from school to work. To explore this, we apply a life course perspective to the analysis of a rich data set of 164 qualitative interviews. Interviews were conducted in

2017 with participants of diverse LLL policies across two functional regions (FRs) in each of the nine partner countries in the YOUNG_ADULLLT project.

Young people's life course transitions

Life course research is an enquiry into the life course transitions of individuals 'through institutions and social structures, and is embedded in relationships that constrain and support behaviour – both the individual life course and a person's developmental trajectory are interconnected with the lives and development of others' (Elder, 1998: 5). This perspective draws attention to the dynamic interplay in human lives among social structures, institutions and individual action. Unlike the life cycle approach, focus on the life course employs a contextualist approach linking individual lives to social time and place (Heinz, 2009). The timing of key events in the life course is studied in relation to the historical period in which the life is lived, and the interaction of multiple milieus is acknowledged (Mills, 1959).

  Life course research will be impaired if the contextualist approach is not combined with biographical analysis, which understands the biography as a story told in the present about events and experiences in a person's life in the past and expectations for the future (Kohli, 2005). The biographical approach is premised on the assumption that individuals actively construct their own biography (Heinz, 2009), making more or less informed choices, attributing meanings to their actions and reflecting upon them, thus creating their own understanding of the sequence of events in their life course. In addition, life course research is comparative in essence and enriches its potential when applying a case-study approach to comparisons among youth transitions in different contexts. While LLL policies usually start with the construction of a 'normal life' drawing upon dominant social expectations of standard life courses in which life events occur with uniform timing (Brückner and Mayer, 2004: 32), the comparative approach to life course research aims to provide thick descriptions of a small number of cases. Through a matching and contrasting of cases (revealing meaningful similarities and differences) life course research can outline not only the broad trends over time in major institutions, but also how they are perceived, experienced and acted upon by individuals. The life course perspective helps capture the dynamics of school-to-work transitions, setting them within a wider picture of individual lives, and thus avoiding the static vocabulary of many contemporary approaches to the issue (Vogt, 2018).

In this chapter we examine the experiences of young adults taking part in LLL policies as an integral part of their learning biography and focus on their subjective interpretations. We look at the ways in which participation in learning programmes beyond formal schooling shapes their life projects. It is important to study young people's learning biographies and their perspectives on LLL policies as the latter have predominantly been developed, implemented and evaluated using a top-down approach in which experts and policy makers decide what is best for the client group and society. The 'voices' of young people involved in LLL are rarely heard and even less often taken into consideration in policy design or implementation. We start from an understanding of youth participation in LLL as much wider than attendance and successful completion of the programme (with 'success' measured by institutional criteria). The aim is to go beyond the perception of young people as passive 'beneficiaries' and to analyse their narratives as co-creators of their learning experiences.

Researching lived experiences of LLL

This chapter builds upon research conducted as part of the YOUNG_ADULLLT research presented in this book. Qualitative interviews were conducted in 2017 with young adults (aged 18 to 29) involved in diverse LLL programmes run by various governmental and private institutions in 18 FRs in nine European countries. The programmes were chosen to be representative of the main priorities in regional LLL policies, while the selection of interviewees aimed at a diverse distribution in terms of gender, family background and achieved educational level.

The interviews followed a common framework, starting with an open question inviting young people to tell their life story and then proceeding with more focused questions about their learning trajectories, biographical turning points, interaction with significant others and life projects in the near future. The interviews, complying with the ethical requirements developed as part of the project, were conducted by trained researchers from each national team, who took care to carefully select the settings and guarantee the anonymity of participants. The interviews were audio recorded and then fully transcribed in the national languages. The texts were coded following the approach developed by Corbin and Strauss (1990) and some thematic groupings were tracked in all regions.

The 164 narratives of young people's learning biographies provided the rich and abundant empirical evidence for this chapter. The

authors worked with the original fully transcribed interviews from their countries, the extended English summaries of interviews in other languages and the national and comparative reports. We were conscious that the interview itself is a process of interaction shaped by different asymmetries and hierarchies, which inevitably affected young people's narratives. In addition, even though we differentiated between the person's life trajectory (sequence of events) and the story they told us about their life, we had to keep in mind that narrations were framed by the research focus on LLL policies, which might or might not be of biographical significance for the individual young person. Therefore, rather than attempting to present an objective 'evidence of experience' (Scott, 1991: 797), we analysed how the young adults constructed this experience and attached meaning to their lives.

The cross-country and cross-case comparison of young people's experiences of LLL is particularly challenging due to the diversity of their contextual living conditions, as well as their own diverse strategies. In what follows we first examine the structures of opportunities and constraints that young participants in LLL programmes face, and then focus on their learning biographies and individual agency to cope with barriers and activate resources available to them.

The social context of young adults' experiences of LLL

The context of young people's learning trajectories is formed by their country's living conditions, such as structures of economy, employment, education, welfare systems and culture; the regional and local labour markets and the institutional structures available to the young; and, finally, the immediate individual conditions such as family background, health and previous trajectory in the formal educational system. More detailed analysis of living conditions and risk profiles is presented in Chapter 9 in this volume. Here it is sufficient to indicate some of the most significant factors impacting youth life paths through social institutions.

The young adults' lived experiences we studied are embedded in a post-crisis Europe under conditions of sluggish economic growth, where significant improvements in the employment prospects of present-day young people appear unattainable. In the second decade of the 21st century, living standards in the countries under study vary from the highest gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in Austria and Germany, to the lowest in Bulgaria and Croatia. Again, Germany and Austria together with the UK have the highest youth employment rates, while they are lower in Italy and Spain. The latter two countries,

together with Portugal, have the highest shares of early school leavers. Institutional structures for education-to-employment transitions also vary among countries, forming different employment and welfare regimes. In terms of employment systems, the countries in the study represent the liberal orientation of the UK system, the continental system of Germany and Austria, the social democratic model in Finland, the state-coordinated model in Italy and Spain, and the transition system in Bulgaria and Croatia. Types of youth and welfare policies are similar, with some important deviations (Wallace and Bendit, 2009). Education and training systems are most differentiated in Germany and Austria, and least so in Bulgaria and Croatia.

Diversity in living conditions increases when we delve into the immediate milieu in which young people's lives unfold. At the regional and local level, the impact of concrete measures in addition to that of the general institutional systems becomes visible. Most of our interviewees were involved in programmes and projects developed within the employment sector of their municipalities, with the rest in the educational and youth and social policy sectors. The policy measures were also very diverse, constructing varying definitions of their target groups, pursued objectives and implementation methods. The young participants themselves were not a homogeneous group of under-achievers lacking basic skills. They displayed a wide range of differences and inequalities in terms of gender, ethnicity, family background and learning biographies prior to joining the programmes. Some had a linear upward trajectory in the formal educational system, including university level, before enrolling in an LLL initiative. Others were early school leavers who did not have the educational credentials to take up vocational training in the formal educational system. While some were from privileged family backgrounds, others lacked family support or suffered from parental abuse, had fractured learning biographies, early parenting responsibilities or physical and psychological problems. Given the complex entanglement of structural, institutional and individual factors at different societal levels, we focus on examining young participants' perspectives on their involvement in LLL.

Young adults' learning biographies

Our research confirms findings from many studies about the diversification of young people's educational trajectories in present-day European societies (Serracant, 2015; Cuconato et al, 2016). Based on the ways in which young people construct their learning

experiences within social structures and educational institutions and the subjective strategies for coping with uncertainty, we identified five clusters of learning biographies. The clustering of the learning biographies started with consideration of young adults' living conditions in the country and regional context, family background, ethnicity or migrant status and health. We delved into their school career, considering their subjective satisfaction or experiences of bullying or low performance, and then examined their motivation and expectations upon joining an LLL programme. Finally, we focused on the biographical significance attributed to their participation in the policy, interaction with practitioners, skills learnt, developed or ignored, and perceived effects on their self-esteem and life projects. We did not search for an exhaustive typology of the logical combinations between these indicators but instead looked for emerging patterns in the life stories of the interviewed young adults. In particular, we distinguished whether:

- the involvement was led by expectations for personal development or external pressures to meet the demands of the educational and employment systems;
- the participation was experienced as increasing personal autonomy or as forced dependence;
- the effect was perceived as enabling or constraining individual life projects.

In what follows we present the identified clusters, including some exemplary trajectories of young people in each cluster.

Taking a detour back to the education system

This cluster combines the learning strategies of young adults who have slipped out of a normative progression through the stages of the formal educational system. Some have experienced a rupture in their 'normal' life trajectory due to illness, family breakdown or violence. Others could not cope with the requirements of school and left because of low performance. Following an early break with formal education, these young adults invested in their participation in LLL programmes, expecting the training to serve as a remedial pathway and door-opener to a 'normal' life course trajectory. For the early school leavers, the goal is to complete the 12th grade, which is seen as essential for employability in the modern economy. For others, the training is a manageable springboard into higher education in their desired field

having not been accepted despite several attempts to pass the regular exams. This learning strategy is also found among immigrant youth in many countries who do not have recognised educational credentials, or who possess occupational skills developed in informal jobs not valued in the labour market. Young people in this group become involved in diverse LLL programmes in order to achieve integration in the host educational and employment system. The expectations interviewees attach to their participation are to progress in a career they have deliberately planned, and achieve 'a regular' and 'peaceful' life.

Lucas (Y_PT_VdA_1) is a 28-year-old man from the region of Vale do Ave in Portugal. Conditions for school-to-work transitions in the region were unfavourable in 2017, as Portugal was among the countries hardest hit by the 2008 economic crisis. What is more, the formerly industry-oriented regional economy was still contracting in 2017, living standards were below national and European averages, the unemployment rate was high and the region continued to be characterised by a traditionally low-educated workforce.

Lucas's family is working class, his father having only basic education while his mother managed to finish high school (12th grade) by taking advantage of a new policy initiative at the time. The young man left school early after repeating the last year of basic education and starting secondary school, but was unable to pass the professional aptitude test. He found a job almost immediately as an electrician with the help of a cousin, and worked for six years before becoming unemployed during the economic crisis. He registered as a job seeker and enrolled in a vocational training programme.

In Lucas's words, there is 'nothing dramatic' in his personal or family life and while he is on good terms with his parents, he has not received a lot of direction and advice from them. In the narrative of his learning biography, Lucas expresses regret about his decision to leave school early, explaining it in terms of self-responsibility – 'the wrong decision of an 18-year-old boy' (Y_PT_VdA_1) – although recognising the constraints of his family's financial situation:

> I think that my school time was peaceful, normal. But at the time, I did not want to go on. I wanted my independence, I wanted my car, I wanted to do my things and my parents could not afford it and my option was to go to work. It was more or less like this, but today I regret it, and I am enrolled now and trying to finish 12th grade, to … who knows, maybe get into university. (Y_PT_VdA_1)

He values his experience in the training programme mostly for the opportunity it provides to gain the educational certificate that would allow him to continue along the 'normal' educational path. Although at the time of the interview he was recovering from a knee injury, he was committed to finishing secondary education – 'without the 12th grade you are nothing nowadays' (Y_PT_VdA_1). Like many of his peers, Lucas does not have an explicit life plan and does not elaborate much on his future expectations. Nonetheless, he envisions having a 'normal' life allowing some stability: 'a job, a car, a house' (Y_PT_VdA_1). His childhood dream was to become a professional musician and he still plays guitar in a band. However, he presents himself as a responsible young adult whose main goal is to achieve economic independence, which requires passing through the necessary stages of the school system.

Carmen (Y_IT_M_2) is a 24-year-old single mother from South America who is enrolled in Youth Guarantee in Milan, part of the 'NEETwork' project. The economic conditions in this region are better than those faced by Lucas in Vale do Ave, but her learning biography is marred by her immigrant status. She has chosen to participate in the project in order to address the main gap in her professional profile: an absence of certified work experience:

> About my expectations […] the situation is that I was always an irregular worker and I have nothing to attest my skills; but the positive aspect is that at least this apprenticeship can give me something more. (Y_IT_M_2)

She dropped out of high school because of her son's birth, and at present the absence of a high school degree prevents her from applying for many job openings, even though she acknowledges possessing a medium to high level of actual skills. Indeed, she has strong competences as an administrative technician, which she acquired partly when she was still attending high school (where she was high achiever) and partly through her undeclared activity as a tax return technician.

Carmen would like to launch a micro-credit service for micro enterprises (which, in the case of her network, might be primarily related to ethnic food production and trade). Yet, before pursuing her objectives for the future, she knows that the gap in her professional path must be filled. Carmen appears very aware of both her actual skills (for instance, she considers her traineeship as a secretary to be lower than her competences) and the formal constraints that prevent her from acquiring a higher position on the labour market. Despite

already having made a decision about her future path, she remains torn between her confidence in her own abilities (and their competitiveness in the labour market) and her conscious reading of her condition as a young, migrant single mother who often has to postpone future planning in order to solve more urgent present problems. Carmen interprets starting an internship at a non-profit organisation within the project network as an opportunity to obtain work experience that can be certified and therefore used in future job applications.

Hanging around while waiting for better opportunities

This cluster characterises young adults who have adopted 'a wait-and-see' attitude towards their learning careers. Similar to the previous group, they have experienced some disruption in their life course but do not have a clear educational project and feel at a loss vis-à-vis the structural constraints they are facing. They view training as a period of 'active waiting for a better opportunity'. For many in this group, training is not understood as providing useful skills but as a socially acceptable period of waithood, approved of by parents and other adults. Personally, they appreciate the fact that training schedules provide structure in their daily lives. Participation allows them to consciously avoid making plans and go on 'living day by day'. Many develop a discourse about the lack of labour market opportunities for the current generation (in contrast to that of their parents) and the limited access to education and jobs (including 'nepotism' in the context of south and East European countries). Young people living in regions with growing economies expect that opportunities will improve in the near future, while those from regions with declining economic output envision emigration as a future life strategy.

   Michael (Y_AT_V_8) is 25 and has lived in Vienna his whole life. While Vienna is a big city offering numerous job opportunities, these have declined significantly following the financial crisis and youth unemployment is on the rise. His parents are lower middle class and he has a brother who has always been an excellent student. Michael is on good terms with his family and his parents have encouraged him to make decisions for himself. He moved out of the parental home when he was 18. He maintains a special relationship with his father and grandfather and they all share a passion for football. Football has an important place in his life. He has been playing for many years and since 2013 he has been working as a football coach for boys.

   His educational trajectory is not linear and he presents himself as a 'practical' rather than 'academic' learner. After primary school he

went to an academically oriented secondary school like his brother but had to repeat one year and then transferred to a less demanding general school. After graduating successfully, he enrolled in a college for higher technical education but dropped out after the first year. Since then, Michael's learning biography has entailed participation in various training programmes. He completed a short internship at an insurance company and then a longer apprenticeship in the same company. He went on to complete compulsory civilian service. At the time of the interview he was involved in a vocational education and training programme while looking for better job opportunities in insurance.

The young man describes his experiences on the programme as generally positive. He appreciates that his participation gives him a regular day-to-day structure and the opportunity to do some practical tasks for which he receives acknowledgement:

> I thought, yes, instead of just sitting at home and doing nothing and doing whatever, I come here. Because … getting up early, that's great. Because if I find a job, I will already be in that rhythm. (Y_AT_V_8)

He does not envision gaining any useful skills, as his dream job is to become a professional football coach. He can afford a period of waithood thanks to support from his parents and the payment he receives from the programme. He does not feel pressed to make life plans and prefers to keep his options open. He is convinced that just being in training increases his chances of getting a job.

Marco (Y_IT_M_1) is a 23-year-old man from Milan, who has not completed vocational high school, and perceives himself as not suited to formal schooling. After dropping out of school, he began a three-year educational/training path, but did not complete this either. Afterwards, he started looking for a job, but in his opinion the global crisis has diminished his already limited possibilities as a young unqualified worker. His relative financial stability (he is an only child and both his parents have stable employment) has not 'pushed' him to accept any job available.

> [My parents'] expectation was that I would get a diploma and find work which I liked … you know … kind of … you wake up every morning and do something you really like, instead of 'I got this [chance for work] consequently I do this [work]' … but that's not what actually happened … (Y_IT_M_1)

The traineeship was an enjoyable experience, and Marco was able to develop positive relations with his colleagues and his tutor, while obtaining good evaluations for his duties as a handyman. All these factors led his tutor to offer him a further six months' traineeship, which was quite disappointing (he was expecting to receive a full-time job offer). Marco decided to view this as a chance to strengthen his connections to a positive working environment, but his lack of specific skills makes him feel uncertain in his aspirations:

> Very honestly, I don't really know what I would like to do … the fact is that at the moment I can't say 'Ok, I've completed this school consequently I know how to do this or that.' (Y_IT_M_1)

This affects his attitude to planning: Marco prefers to avoid contemplating the future, instead focusing on his daily routine. Nonetheless, while he does not declare specific professional ambitions, neither does this prevent him from envisioning a very traditional future private life (marriage, children and a home).

'Coming out of your shell'

Some young adults interpret their participation in LLL as a turning point in their biography, a major shift in the life course through discovering their true identity. They narrate their experiences of training as not only providing them with basic and occupational skills but primarily as 'a newly found route to significant personal development' or as 'self-creation'. Among them are school dropouts coming from families with limited resources, often from migrant backgrounds. The members of this group raised in more privileged families describe themselves 'before the training' as isolated, unable to establish meaningful contact with others or formulate significant personal goals. Following negative experiences at school, training programmes have helped them become active learners, change their outlook on life and create new life plans. Similar patterns of enabling learning experiences in LLL programmes were found in most regions, as they were shaped by the individual agency of young people and the quality of interactions during training.

  Assen (Y_BG_P_11) is a 29-year-old Bulgarian man living in the FR of Plovdiv. The region's economic output and living standards are far below the European average and 40 per cent of the population are at risk of severe material deprivation. Early school leaving is also highly

prevalent, with one in five young people classed as not in education, employment or training (NEET), among whom young people with disabilities, single mothers and Roma youth are over-represented. While many young people in the country risk leaving school early, Roma in Bulgaria frequently leave school after the 6th or 7th grade or earlier, often resulting in illiteracy.

Assen comes from a poor Roma family with many children and until his involvement in the LLL programme he had the 'normal' (for his community) trajectory of a short educational career, early work and early marriage. In his childhood he used to spend time on the streets with his friends and school did not occupy an important place in his life. His mother often advised him to finish secondary school but was unable to help him with everyday school assignments. He left school after the 8th grade and went to Greece where his parents were working on a farm.

> I was stupid then, I was eager to have a car and people were making good money in Greece … Now, as I see it, if I had thought before, then I would not have left school and gone to Greece. Because the car would still be bought, but learning is very difficult as it is, and more so when life has gone in a different direction … (Y_BG_P_11)

Assen's decision to leave school occurred during the first years of market transition in Bulgaria when local enterprises were collapsing, poverty was rising and living standards in Greece appeared far superior. During one of his holidays back home he married his girlfriend and they returned to Greece together where they stayed for some years more. After the 2008 crisis, the economic situation in Greece worsened significantly and the young family returned to Plovdiv. Back home, life was very difficult and Assen could not find a full-time job. He was contacted by the Land Source of Income Foundation. They enrolled him in their training programme for eight months and helped him to start farming. An agronomist from the Foundation regularly comes to the village and advises Assen.

Assen is very satisfied that now he works for himself and makes good money from agricultural produce. He has plans to buy more land and build a warehouse. He is also determined to continue studying and signed up for a part-time course to gain secondary education and he insists that his children do well in school:

> I was nothing; I was really nothing. Now I'm a bit better, in the sense of a little more knowledge … I may say they

> [the Foundation] *taught me how to become a better person …*
> (Y_BG_P_11; emphasis added)

A comparable case is that of *Duncan*, a 19-year-old man from the FR of Aberdeen (Y_UK_A_3). Duncan lives in very different conditions and comes from a more privileged family than Assen. Aberdeenshire has above-average incomes and low unemployment in comparison with the rest of Scotland and the European Union (EU) as a whole, but its economy is undergoing rapid economic changes due to the recent downturn in the oil industry. Young people's lives are characterised by challenges due to unexpected job losses and economic flux, as well as rising inequalities in the distribution of wealth and opportunities between the region's communities.

Duncan's biography is one of difficulties at school where he did not like most subjects except biology. Learning has 'always been like a weird thing for me'. He continued to struggle with education until he reached college, and he dropped out of this during the first year. He attributes his troubled educational path to a delayed diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, which made it hard for him to focus. Although he fought with his mother to sign up for a social science course in college and began the programme, he had disagreements with his tutors. In his carer he has four months of work experience in a fish factory and a few months of unemployment. He was referred to his current four-week placement in a social indoor activity centre by the Labour Office. There his life started changing for the better. He has gone through unhappiness and uncertainty but now he feels he is understood and appreciated by his trainer and others on the placement. In his narrative he describes his team leader at the centre as a role model:

> He's just an amazing person … I see him as like, like an authority figure that wasn't this condescending, demeaning kind of person. He really opened my eyes. It was cool … As in like if you didn't feel really like doing something, he would get you to the point where you would do it. (Y_UK_A_3)

The greatest benefit for him was the increased confidence and self-esteem as a competent learner, a rediscovery of a better 'you'. As Duncan explained:

> It's a lot of fun. It's so much fun. I enjoyed it. I really did. They really make you bring out the person you didn't

think you were. Like, you feel a lot more confident, speak a lot better. It just really brings out the true you. *They try to focus on making you come out of your shell.* Really good … (Y_UK_A_3; emphasis added)

He has started making plans for the future, considering a new college. His dream job would be a marine biologist but he does not think that is realistic. He is sure, however, that he will find a job he would like to do, not necessarily highly paid but where he would feel fulfilled as a person.

Learning by helping those in need

Our interviewees in Genoa exemplified another distinctive pattern of attributing subjective meaning to their participation in LLL programmes and constructing their learning biography. This was closely linked to the satisfaction of doing something for the community and learning civic responsibility through volunteering. Getting involved in a volunteering programme was not 'the only choice' for these young people, although it was clearly influenced by the lack of labour market opportunities in the FR. Young people in this category appreciated the experience both for the skills gained and the feeling of solidarity. Commonly, this group of 'civic learners' had a long trajectory in the formal school system with high academic performance and positive experiences of school and university. They came from well-to-do families that provided support and understanding. As an alternative to accepting low-quality jobs, the young adults on this track value the skills developed through civic service and consider it relevant in their continuous job search. A long career path in the formal educational system followed by difficulty integrating into the labour market was also common for some young adults in Bulgarian and Croatian LLL programmes.

Emma (Y_IT_G_2) is a 24-year-old woman enrolled in the Regional Civic Service Programme in Genoa developed under the Italian Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan. In terms of economic and sociocultural living conditions for young people, the region of Genoa is one of the better-developed areas in Europe. With the economic and financial crisis that began in 2008, however, the Italian labour market contracted significantly and the share of NEETs among young people rose high above the EU average. Following the tradition of generous and lengthy family support for offspring, parents try to mitigate the effect of the crisis (Bello and Cuzzocrea, 2018). For the highly qualified, the issue is not so much economic hardship as barriers to

the realisation of their life plans. Emma is from a middle-class family and still lives with her parents. She is on good terms with them, but experienced 'a dramatic break with the whole family' (Y_IT_G_2) when she did not choose her parents' strong preferences for law or medicine at university. During her studies she completed an internship in the municipality of Genoa, which she enjoyed immensely.

Emma is among the LLL participants who had a long and linear trajectory in the formal educational system, achieving a three-year university degree. Her break from the normative life course came when she did not achieve a smooth transition to employment. She applied for various jobs but refused offers that she considered 'exploitative' or 'deceiving' (Y_IT_G_2). She joined the Civic Service in Genoa and is currently working in a prison with immigrants and minors, helping them to complete administrative documents. She is highly satisfied with her experience in the Civic Service and is applying for another year, this time in the National Civic Service Programme. She thinks that it has done a lot for her personal growth but not her job prospects. The skills she values most are described in the following way:

> a whole package of skills regarding the ability to listen, to reflect, the ability to manage debates, to be sure of oneself without leading to pure egocentrism, and therefore to manage oneself in relation to others. (Y_IT_G_2)

Her life plans for the short term are to continue living with her parents as she does not see herself able to afford living costs alone. Yet she is experiencing a new conflict in her parental home since her mother 'discovered' that Emma is homosexual. In the long term Emma sees herself living with her partner in the countryside and working 'in the social sphere, helping people in vulnerable situations' (Y_IT_G_2).

Struggling for autonomy

Finally, this cluster refers to young people attempting to 'take their life back into their own hands.' In contrast to the previous category, most of the young adults are in very vulnerable situations with limited or no family support and participate in social policy programmes directed at overcoming severe psychological and physical problems. Involvement in the programmes offers them personalised support to regain self-esteem and 'reclaim autonomy'. Young people in this group are predominantly found in FRs with differentiated and individualised social and youth policy systems, such as Finland and Germany. Many

of them are fighting against social injustices and are looking for a different way of learning that would allow them to reconcile training and working with personal challenges and responsibilities. Some of them are critical of structural barriers and actively contest the unequal distribution of power.

Hannah (Y_GER_F_1) is an 18-year-old woman living in Rhein-Main FR in Germany. The region is a tightly knit urban metropolitan area that is fast growing and attracts workers from across the country and abroad. It is a wealthy region with a GDP per capita more than three times the EU average. The youth unemployment rate and proportion of NEETs are much lower, but opportunities are unevenly distributed among youth in the region.

Hannah's life trajectory is marked by experiences of violence and mental illness. She was a victim of violence in her family and at school. Her family is working class, facing persistent economic difficulties and she often suffered from her father's brutality. Her school path was difficult, with 'regular' incidents of bullying from other students and even a teacher in primary school, because of her speech disorder or 'just because they wanted to' (Y_GER_F_1). The youth welfare service intervened when she was in the 6th grade because of sexual assault in the family committed some years ago and placed her in a children's home against her will. She stayed there for a few months and then was allowed to return home to her family. She changed schools twice and managed to finish lower secondary school with a school-leaving certificate. Most of her life has centred on medical treatment, appointments for speech therapy and counselling for self-harm and depression, which inevitably affected her school career, her life course trajectory and her own self-perception.

We placed Hannah in the 'struggling for autonomy' group, although there were some other obvious 'fighters' in Frankfurt such as the young woman threatening the job centre with legal proceedings or young mothers fighting to sustain independent lives for themselves and their children. Hannah was perhaps in the most vulnerable situation but, despite all hardships, she demonstrated an impressive pursuit of autonomy combined with self-reflexivity and self-deprecation:

> I have learned that I can come to them with every simple and trivial question and I get an answer. And I really found hope here and I have the feeling that I gained perspective. […] I have the feeling that here are human beings who really support special cases like me (laughs). Yes, and it is the first time I feel safe. (Y_GER_F_1)

Hannah appreciates the individualised support she receives from practitioners, which stabilises her everyday life and allows her to make plans for the future. She is interested in psychology, seeing herself as a social worker in later life. While the programme's underlying understanding of autonomy is focused on employability and most of the young participants accept this objective, Hannah demonstrates a developed consciousness of youth rights. In her interview she insisted that young people struggling with diseases have the right to be integrated into society to the same degree as those without special needs, and that wider society should accept their independence:

> [T]hat I as a human being, as an adult am allowed to live and learn and that I as an affected person, I am allowed to work, that I can be normal despite my problems, that I have my place in normal society. (Y_GER_F_1)

Mahamadou (Y_SP_G_9) is a 24-year-old man who arrived in Girona from the Gambia when he was 12. Although immigration figures for the region are quite similar to the countrywide mean, the city where he lives has a high foreign-born population. Together with a high rate of youth unemployment, the city faces the significant issue of early school leaving, especially among students from immigrant backgrounds.

In his life trajectory, Mahamadou has had to face several difficulties both in his learning path and his personal life. His migration was not easy, despite his father having resided in the country for some time and having a social network in the city. He had to learn a new language and had trouble finishing compulsory secondary education 'on time'. He then started combining different jobs and training programmes, always prioritising employment, 'because right now I need money more than I need to study' (Y_SP_G_9).

In addition, he is aware of his family's economic difficulties and does not want to be a burden, so has squatted with some friends for the last four years. At the time of interview, he was happily working at a fuel station – a position that workers from his LLL programme helped him to find. He gives half of his salary to his family and hopes to be able to rent or buy a flat for himself in the future. He values the programme for the prospects of an independent life that it offers:

> Honestly, I want to work and start looking for a stable life, and that's all, and have a normal life. […] Every father or mother wants to see that his/her son is already married,

and that he is ok, because me, 24 years old, why am I not married? Because you don't have a job, you don't have money, you have nothing, you cannot marry. (Y_SP_G_9)

After the training he expects to find a job that would allow him to save money and build a family, which seems central to his understanding of autonomy.

Conclusions

In this chapter we gave room to young adults' 'voices' as they reflect upon the subjective meaning of their LLL experiences. Our study shows that the life course transitions of young adults are highly differentiated – both in terms of structural inequalities in their societies and localities and in terms of the LLL policy programmes offered to them. Institutional factors may reinforce or weaken structural barriers, but young people's individual agency also filters and influences the institutional policies and practices regulating youth transitions and social integration. The individual life paths of our interviewees diverge widely from the normative life courses envisioned and promulgated by LLL programmes. While in most countries young people have internalised a discourse of self-responsibility and achieving autonomy through labour market inclusion, they still attribute different meanings to their involvement and place it within a much wider framework of life strategies.

We have presented five clusters of learning biographies, differentiating between young adults' motivations for joining LLL programmes, as well as their expectations, the learning processes involved in training and the effect on their life plans as perceived by young people themselves. We also followed the educational paths of nine young men and women who more or less fit those profiles. Some participants like Lucas and Carmen are making efforts to conform to normative life paths despite the different vulnerabilities they face. Others like Michael and Marco instead pretend to do so while exploiting other opportunities for self-development. Young people like Emma accept LLL as an opportunity to help others in need while at the same time developing their own 'egoistical' occupational skills and prospects. Assen, Duncan and other young people have found in LLL a path towards personal development, and Hannah and Mahamadou view their participation in LLL as a way to achieve autonomy and recognition while fighting for their right to social integration.

The diversity of these different profiles indicates that LLL policies do not have to reflect a 'standard' view of lifestyles, and instead should

consider the different needs arising from de-standardisation. As a result, European policies, while charged with tackling similar challenges across countries, need to be adapted to the national and local context as well as the individual circumstances of young adults. If, in the second half of the 20th century, the affirmation of a 'standard' life course was supported by stable institutional structures and relatively homogeneous cultural models, today we are witnessing the inability of social institutions such as schools, the labour market, the family and welfare systems to guarantee orderly and predictable life paths. As a result, transitions to adulthood are prolonged and outcomes uncertain.

Our main finding is that youth participation in learning requires recognition of young people's active contribution to the governance of LLL policies, through autonomy, subjectivity and enabling young people to manage their learning experiences and integrate them meaningfully into their individual biographies. The young interviewees expressed dissatisfaction that most programmes were not responsive to their needs arising from other life domains, and did not appreciate skills and competencies developed informally. As a whole, the study shows that it is possible and desirable that young people, including those in the most vulnerable situations, participate in their support programmes, with participation not limited to the 'choice' to pursue a programme or not. From young adults' perspective, the objective of LLL programmes should be to encourage young people to become active learners, finding their own subjectively meaningful ways of being part of their societies.

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PART III

Young adults' experiences of lifelong learning in the European Union

Assessing young adults' living conditions across Europe using harmonised quantitative indicators: opportunities and risks for policy makers

Rosario Scandurra, Kristinn Hermannsson and Ruggero Cefalo

Introduction

Understanding the contexts within which young people develop their biographies, the transition to adulthood and the link to the opportunities and constraints structures they provide is becoming increasingly relevant in researching the transition from youth into adulthood. This chapter provides a comparative assessment of key measures of young adults' contextual living conditions in European regions. This is part of research carried out within YOUNG_ADULLLT. The main aim of the chapter is to describe a framework of analysis for assessing young adults' living conditions, demonstrate the pros and cons of such an approach and to report some key results about young adults' living conditions.[1] We derive our results from a selection within a wide range of socioeconomic indicators on the specific living conditions of young adults, focusing on lifelong learning (LLL) and inclusion in education and the labour market as these data are widely used to steer policy-making. Specifically, we aim to disentangle the territorial dimension of contextual living conditions in which young adults are inserted in relation to LLL, in order to understand how regional contexts interact with dynamics of growth and social inclusion. In this sense, living conditions are understood in a comprehensive manner as a plurality of aspects within which individual life courses unfold, such as socioeconomic conditions, the labour market, education and training systems and well-being.

   This does not imply a deterministic view where the context and structural factors completely prevail over individual agency and self-

determination. However, it stresses the relevance of contextual living conditions in building different structures of opportunities for young people, in terms of a complex mix of enabling and constraining features, according to the place where they live. The results contribute to building the contextual structure of enablements and constraints with which young people engage to actively form their dispositions and choices.

This contribution also represents an effort to move away from the nation state as a basic unit of analysis. Global evaluation assessments are reinforcing methodological nationalism by considering mean average of performance. This is particularly the case for educational studies (e.g. PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) or TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study)). Our approach is in response to a general tendency in the social sciences, and in comparative education in particular, to adopt the nation state as an assumed unit of analysis (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2003; Robertson, 2011). This is related to different factors such as the construction of the nation state, its historical tradition and the establishment of statistics as a discipline (Porter, 1996; Desrosières, 2008). Furthermore, we observe that the increasing influence of transnational organisations and the availability of international assessments have altered the way governments and education stakeholders think, discuss and make decisions about education systems (Thévenot, 2009; Mundy et al, 2016; Normand, 2016). The influence of these assessments has not escaped criticism from the comparative education community, although this criticism has revolved predominantly around the political use and interpretation of this data (Grek, 2016). This chapter presents some of key measures of young adults' living conditions in Europe, providing a country-average picture. This is very much connected to a branch of literature on regional cohesion policy which has concentrated mainly on economic growth in European Union (EU) territories or which has traditionally focused on different area of policy (e.g. agriculture). However, efforts to produce context-based measures for assessing living conditions at a regional level are still fragmented, reflecting the neglected importance of territorial differences.

Constructing a framework of analysis for assessing young adults' living conditions

In contemporary societies, young individuals face uncertainty in the transition to adulthood and labour market entry, as well as in the phase of family formation, leading them to be labelled the 'losers' of

globalization processes (Buchholz et al, 2009). The result is a life course often characterized by uncertain access to material resources and the fragility of family and social networks (Blossfeld and Hofäcker, 2014). There is broad consensus that young people's transitions from youth to adulthood are undergoing de-standardization, individualization and fragmentation (Biggart and Walther, 2006).

Difficulties experienced in the transition from school to work are usually deemed as particularly relevant in this regard. By the end of the 1970s, the match between labour demand and supply had become more problematic as macroeconomic policy in Europe shifted away from a full employment imperative to a low inflation imperative. Many factors conspire in the difficulties experienced by young adults in accessing employment. First, the ongoing flexibilisation of the labour market brings about the spread of temporary and non-standard work arrangements (as opposed to a standard working relationship based on a full-time and permanent contract). This has increased the risk of being trapped in low-income and precarious dead-end jobs, with negative long-term effects on individual working biographies and future pensions (Cuzzocrea, 2014). Second, the trend of tertiarisation and the expansion of high productivity economic sectors imply a stronger disadvantage for people possessing low or obsolete skills, who mostly end up as unemployed or employed in the low value-added service sector, depicting a typical post-industrial employment problem (Bonoli, 2012). One could object that younger generations are on average better educated than older cohorts. However, and here we come to the third factor implied, when caught in the school-to-work transition phase they often lack job experience requested by employers, nor do they possess strong ties with social partners and consequently strategic power for negotiation. Therefore, stable employment in permanent and well-paid jobs is quite hard to achieve for young labour market entrants. Ryan (2008) refers to this paradoxical disadvantage as a *double skill bias*, as it refers both to low skills and to the lack of job-related and soft skills that can be fully developed through work experience. In the literature on labour market participation and growing inequalities, young people are often considered as outsiders, a group characterized by disadvantaged conditions and less opportunities with respect to other groups of insiders such as, for instance, middle-aged males with a permanent working position (Lindbeck and Snower, 2001; Emmenegger et al, 2012). This condition is exacerbated by demographic changes that weaken the caring capacities of families (population ageing, low fertility rates and diffusion of new family models), as well as by the slow adaptation of welfare programmes to the

changing configuration of risk profiles (Ferrera, 1996; Bonoli, 2005). However, such a general trend is mediated by varying configurations of the interface among the education system, the labour market and the welfare state that influences young individuals' opportunities and constraints, as debated in the literature on LLL (Rubenson, 2006; Rubenson and Desjardins, 2009; Blossfeld et al, 2014; Lehmann, 2014). In this light, Verdier (2012) builds a typology of public policies' regimes of LLL, stressing the relevance of each national context, while Pastore (2011) draws upon the literature on comparative welfare states describing related 'worlds' of school-to-work transitions. In a similar fashion, Walther (2006) looks at different transition regimes, identifying variations in the interplay between specific contextual structures and agency expressed by young people's subjective perspectives. The relationship between structural reproduction and the actual decision-making of individuals was highly debated in stratification research and youth transition research, with the latter criticizing the overemphasis and relevance of the capacity of institutional structure to reinforce inequality and produce vulnerability, thus stressing the concept of agency (Lehmann, 2014). Without neglecting the influence of social structures, scholars state that personal agency is always present in the transition from youth to adulthood: young people can actively shape some important dimensions of their experience, as they make distinctive choices about their education and career pathways at critical junctures (Anisef et al, 2000).

In our understanding, living conditions refers to the exposure to social disadvantage coming from complex configurations of risks affecting various life domains. It is a 'fluctuating' condition of weak social integration and high insecurity (Castel, 2000) that overlaps only partially with the identification of socially excluded groups characterized by material deprivation. In this light, scholars investigating economic insecurity (which is a component of social insecurity and vulnerability) argue that the growing inequality in present European societies poses threats not only at the bottom of the income distribution, but also in the traditionally protected and secure middle classes (Mau et al, 2012; Ranci et al, 2014). Therefore, we underline the necessity of investigating people's material living conditions (OECD, 2017) in their specific contexts (Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Kazepov and Ranci, 2016), as these are strongly connected to their degree of social integration. Institutional structures and specific local characteristics are important mediators in shaping young people's lives. In this chapter, we investigate the *contextual living conditions* through a set of key indicators that shape young adults'

opportunity structures (Kerckhoff, 1995, 2001; Cloward and Ohlin, 2013; Lehmann, 2014) in the regions where they live and build their life trajectories. These are the tertiary education attainment (TEA) rate, the early school leavers (ESL) rate, the youth unemployment rate (YUR) and the not in employment, education or training (NEET) rate.

Comparative analyses of inequality, poverty and vulnerability have mainly taken individuals or countries as their unit of analysis (Ranci, 2010) while less attention has been devoted to contextual and place-based approaches. However, several recent phenomena have directed attention towards regional and local levels of analysis: processes of European integration and rescaling limited the role of the central state and at the same time attributed greater relevance to subnational scales of governance (Kazepov, 2010), while marked and persisting regional and territorial disparities emerged within European countries, as the multifaceted debate on territorial cohesion demonstrates (Medeiros, 2016). In this light, Atkinson and colleagues (2002) stress the importance of regional and place-based indicators, particularly when considering a wider view of exclusion that covers more dimensions, including poverty, education and health. This implies taking into consideration the interplay among contextual factors as a manifestation of socioeconomic trends in the region and the impact of institutional factors related to welfare provision and structures of multi-level governance. Therefore, we focus on the contextual living conditions in selected regions (Nomenclature of Territorial Units of Statistics (NUTS) 2 level), and their evolution and the variation within each EU country. What we want to stress is the relevance of contextual living conditions in building different structures of opportunities for young people, in terms of complex mixes of enablements and constraints, according to the place where they live. Our chapter contributes to building a picture of the contextual structure of enablements and constraints with which young people engage to actively form their dispositions and choices.

The regional level as an appropriate unit of analysis

To gain understanding of the heterogeneity of young adults' living conditions, we use the regional level as basic unit of analysis (see Chapter 2, in this volume). Within the EU, the official statistical approach to gathering data on structural information uses a hierarchical categorisation of EU territories and regions. As a geographical system, a division was developed by Eurostat to structure and classify regional

statistics resulting in NUTS. The aim is to provide a single and coherent system for 'comparable and harmonised data for the European Union to use in the definition, implementation and analysis of Community policies' (Eurostat, 2007: 3). This is relevant as, due to changing realities such as internationalisation, Europeanisation and globalisation, the concept of using administrative units, in particular those at the national level, as a unit of analysis is increasingly questioned as a useful tool to describe social realities (Weiler et al, 2017: 10). The YOUNG_ ADULLLT project builds on the perspective that the implementation of LLL policies is best studied at the regional/local level to understand the context specificity of young adult life courses beyond the national level. Therefore, the use of the concept of functional regions (FR) sharpens the focus on regional differences and variations. However, using the concept also raises challenges for the validity of research, as the different FRs can be a (mis)match with the territorial and/or administrative regions that are predominantly used within established statistics, as well as creating challenges in data availability of different sources. For example, statistical data on socioeconomic and socio-demographic aspects, education and training, labour market and welfare dimensions are not limited to administrative units (countries, states, districts, provinces or cities). Departing from the tension among official descriptions of communities, changing realities and data availability, we deal with this in two ways: first, by developing a practical approach of data collection, and, second, by assessing the data production process of the EU. In the case of the latter, the data gaps in the European Statistical System also imply how data are collected within the EU with regard to our FRs. This provides insight into the question of how data are used to steer political processes related to LLL policies and thus the process of definition, coordination and implementation of policy measures. In the case of the data-gathering process, the data collected are the closest possible to the regional level. In this way, pre-existing data on NUTS 2 was used, albeit enriched and specified by local/regional sources. This is relevant as subdivisions in some levels do not necessarily correspond to administrative divisions within the country. The level of analysis is constrained by the existing territorial division, which reflects the data availability.[2]

Considering this mismatch between the territories selected in the project as FRs and the availability of the data extracted from international data sources, the level of analysis varies hugely in terms of percentage of young adults living in these regions. The units of analysis (NUTS 2 regions) vary in terms of territorial extension and rural versus urban as displayed by their degree of urbanization. In the

project sample, 18 regions were selected. Vienna and Bremen are both highly populated and dense areas and correspond administratively to single federal states (*Bundesländer*). Other regions such as Andalusia or Pohjois-ja Itä-Suomi represent, respectively, 17 and 67 per cent of the entire territory of Spain and Finland. Other regions, such as Alentejo or both the Finnish regions selected, are large and rural. This substantially influences the estimates of the overall findings and needs to be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. It is natural to expect that urban areas are richer in terms of labour market opportunities or show a higher degree of economic innovation. Moreover, there have been big changes in terms of the share of young people living in these regions as a result of the different economic circumstances these territories experienced during 2007–14. South European regions such as Spain, Portugal, Italy, Croatia and also Bulgaria suffered a loss in the share of the young adult population, ranging from −39 per cent in Catalonia to −2.7 per cent in Yugozapaden. Similar or even more extreme results are shown if we consider the population between 20 and 34 years old. This is partially related to ageing processes, although migration flows are also an influence in some cases.

Data collation and the operationalisation process

This subsection describes the methodology adopted and the operationalisation process carried out when conducting quantitative research on young adults' contextual living conditions. First, the researchers designed a framework of analysis and selected the dimensions and categories of interest for the overall research. Next, the indicators connected to the categories were selected (see Figure 9.1 and Table 9.A2 for a detailed description of the items).

Third, administrative sources and comparative surveys were identified and the data coverage and quality at national and regional levels assessed. After considering data availability constraints, the level of analysis selected was NUTS 2, which represents the highest level of territorial disaggregation to conduct an in-depth analysis of young adults' living conditions.

The data collation draws on databases from national administrative sources and comparative surveys compiled by international organisations such as Eurostat and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – the main sources of the European Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). In Figure 9.1, the six dimensions of the analysis are show with the correspondent item components.

Figure 9.1: Dimensions and indicators selected

Economics	Demography	Education and training	Labour market	Material conditions	Health
GDP per inhabitant	Old dependency ratio	Students in tertiary education	Employment	Disposable income	Life expectancy
R&D expenditure	Median age of the population	Participation in education	Youth employment	Risk of poverty or social exclusion	Infant mortality
Researchers in all sectors		Early school leavers	Employment since attainment of the highest education	Severe material deprivation	
Motorways		NEET			
Railways		Lower education	Weekly hours in main job		
		Upper secondary education			
		Tertiary education			

Data was collated for a span of more than ten years, from 2005 through 2016, the latest available year. This enables comparability across countries and regions, before and after the Great Recession. Young adults are defined as individuals aged between 18 and 29 years, however, a plurality of age ranges were used pragmatically to overcome data limitations and select sound indicators. For example, for the category of 'attainment' we select the age group 30 and 34 years. This choice was made because the length of education programmes vary largely across the EU and it is better to peak the age group at the point where most of the population has finished their post-compulsory and post-tertiary education experiences.

Limitations and constraints of the analysis

The limitations of the research are diverse and need to be considered carefully. Like all concepts in the social sciences, and academic disciplines in general, the act of constructing measurements implies a selection of the dimensions (in Ancient Greek $\kappa\alpha\tau\eta\gamma\rho\rho\iota\alpha$ or in Latin *categoria*) which should be operationalised and thus leads to a simplification of the object of study. This means a transformation of some qualities into metrics, which is not just a technical process, but an important feature of social life (Hacking, 1999; Desrosières, 2008). This process is generally called commensuration and has been widely

examined by historians, statisticians, sociologists and philosophers (Espeland and Stevens, 1998). From Plato and Aristotle, to Marx, Weber, Simmel and Foucault, the implications of commensuration have been analysed as a process that influences our valuation and the way we invest in goods and services. In the field of education as an example, questions of performance and its evaluation have gained greater social and scholarly prominence in recent years. With the spread of market fundamentalism and the new public management turn, governments have created tools to ensure greater efficacy, with the result that quantitative measures of performance and benchmarking are spreading and are having important configuring effects on a range of institutions and domains of human activity (Lamont 2012; Didier, 2007).

Undoubtedly, our research could not escape the process of commensuration. First, the establishment, recognition and use of a statistical object is very appealing. Second, the interpretation and political use of each measure is a very powerful way to push forward a specific approach or even a political agenda (Meyer and Benavot, 2013). In this sense, our research objectives are constrained by existing and available sources and their comparability, and by statistical issues such as representativeness. On this matter, we stress that the most relevant survey data source for the research objectives is the European LFS, as the only survey available and comparable at NUTS 2 level that collects information on the living conditions of young adults.

There are substantial limitations in the availability of complete information on young adults' living conditions at regional and subnational levels. The Eurostat statistical information system relies on restricted administrative records with territorial disaggregation, mainly on economics, demographics and the health system. Moreover, this information is quite dispersed and not very user-friendly. Few micro-data sources provide a scattered figure on territorial differences in young adults' living conditions. The most complete information available for this purpose is the LFS.

An important limitation to producing regional indicators on young adults' living conditions is the absence of complete information on the sample structure and territorial identification both in the EU-SILC and LFS, which are potentially the most adequate data sources for the research objective. This limited the ability of the YOUNG_ADULLLT project to derive local-level indicators from these sources. FRs partially correspond with the NUTS 2 classification and some indicators are available at this level. However, deriving finer contextual-based measures of young adults and LLL policies in the European territories

is particularly challenging, as few data are available at the NUTS 3 level.

Findings

The findings are organized as follows: first, we report the distribution of four key indicators of young adults' living conditions (Figures 9.2, 9.3, 9.4 and 9.5): TEA, ESL, YUR and NEET. As a second step, we show the evolution of these indicators after 2006 (Table 9.2). As a third step, we report the persistence (or elasticity) over the selected period, which shows how the level of each single indicator at the beginning of the period explains the level in the last period (Table 9.3). Thus, we explore the path dependency of each indicator over the period.

Figure 9.2 plots the country average and the range within each country's regions of the share of people aged 30–34 years with tertiary education attainment (International Standard Classification of Education [ISCED] 5–8). The extremes of the bars represent each country's regions lowest and highest share of tertiary-educated people. The following figures represent the same estimates as previously described and the summary statistics are given in Table 9.A1. Countries represented with a dot are the smallest countries, which are composed of a single territorial unit,[3] for example Malta, Cyprus, Slovenia or Luxembourg. In Lithuania, Luxembourg, Cyprus, Ireland and Sweden more than one out of two people aged between 30 and 34 years attained tertiary education, while in Italy and Romania only one out of four attained a tertiary degree. However, as the figure shows there is a high variation in the share of tertiary-educated young adults within each country, with the highest coefficient of variation in Slovakia, Romania, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary and Denmark.[4] In these countries the share of tertiary-educated young adults varies more compared to the rest of the European countries.

Figure 9.3 plots the country average and the range within each country's regions of the share of ESL. In Spain and Malta more than one out of five people aged between 18 and 24 years is an ESL, while in Croatia, Slovenia, Poland and the Czech Republic not quite 5 per cent or less of these populations is an ESL. However, the country average masks a high regional variation in ESL rates, with the highest variability found in the Czech Republic, Poland, Greece and Bulgaria. In these countries the share of tertiary-educated young adults varies more compared to the rest of the European countries, while it is much reduced in Sweden and Denmark.

Figure 9.2: TEA, ISCED 5–8, % population, aged 30–34
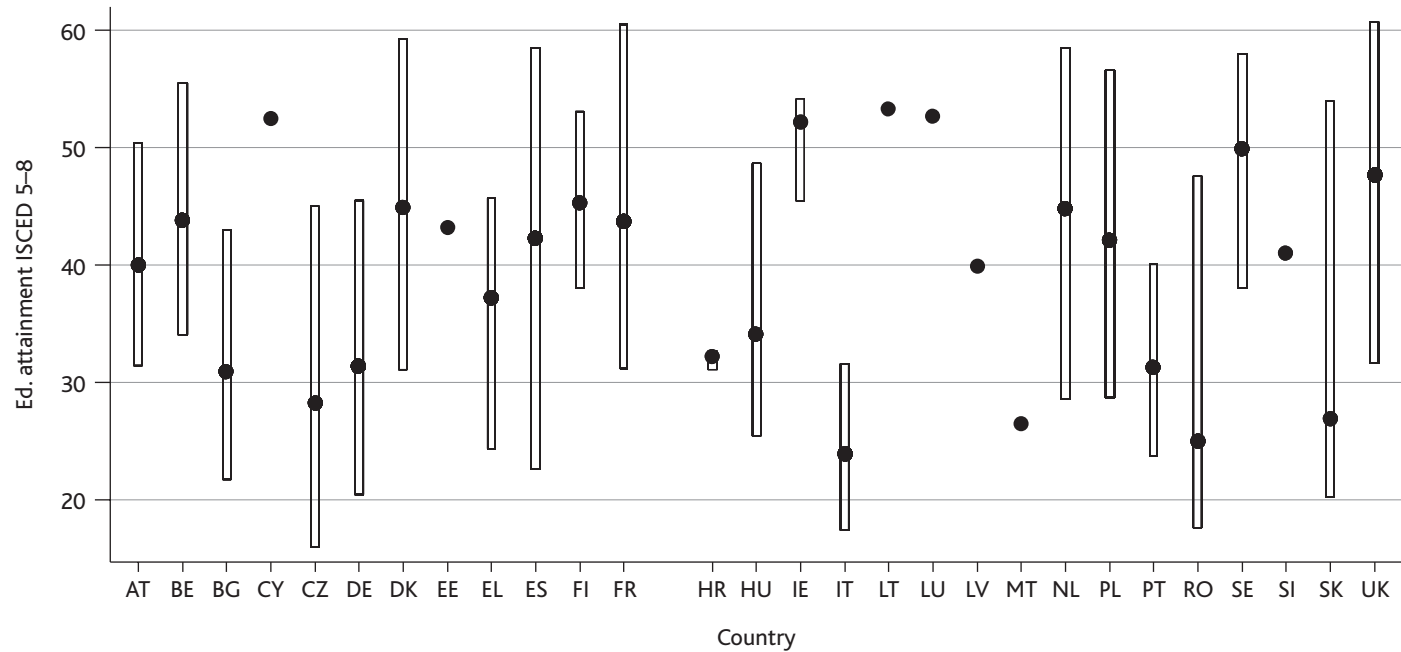
Note: AT: Austria, BE: Belgium, BG: Bulgaria, CY: Cyprus, CZ: Czech Republic, DE: Germany, DK: Denmark, EE: Estonia, EL: Greece, ES: Spain, FI: Finland, FR: France, HR: Croatia, HU: Hungary, IE: Ireland, IT: Italy, LT: Lithuania, LU: Luxembourg, LV: Latvia, MT: Malta, NL: Netherlands, PL: Poland, PT: Portugal, RO: Romania, SE: Sweden, SL: Slovenia , SK: Slovakia, UK: United Kingdom.

Figure 9.3: ESL, % population, aged 18–24
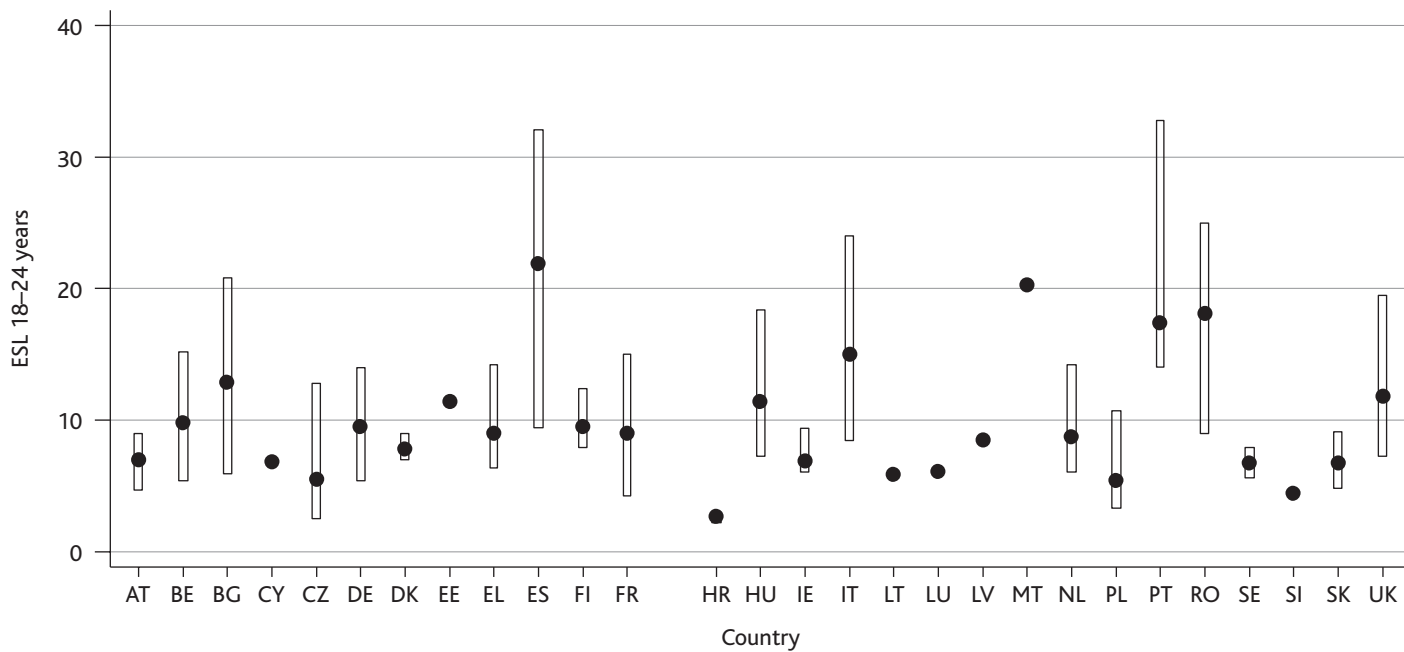
Figure 9.4 plots the country average and the range within each country's regions of the share of YUR. On average, YUR affects more than 42 per cent of the youth population in Spain, Greece, Croatia and Italy, while it is comparatively very low in Germany, Austria, Malta, Denmark and the Netherlands. The countries with the highest variability in YUR are France, Austria, Belgium and Denmark, while Croatia, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Spain report very low regional disparities. Among the countries with the highest share of YUR, Greece and Italy are the ones with the highest regional differences, both reflecting the territorial differentiation that pre-existed the Great Recession and has since widened.

Figure 9.5 shows the NEET rate of the 18–24-year-old population. This indicator is closely connected to YUR, although the age interval differs slightly.

NEET rate is a broad indicator compared to YUR, as suggested by Furlong (2017), grouping together those who are inactive, single mothers or disabled. In Italy, Greece, Croatia, Cyprus and Bulgaria more than one out of four young adults are NEET. In the Netherlands, Denmark, Luxembourg, Germany, Sweden and Austria less than one out of ten young adults are NEET. The biggest difference between regions in NEET share is found in Italy, France and Bulgaria; however, the highest overall variability is found in the former two countries and Portugal.

As a second step of the analysis we explore the evolution of these indicators since 2006. Table 9.1 shows the estimates of a simple version of the model, examining the trend of four key indicators of young adults' living conditions.

We observe that, on average over the period, YUR was 20 per cent. This decreased in 2007 and 2008 by 3 per cent. After 2009 YUR increased steadily, reaching a peak in 2013. The trend of this indicator is one of the most visible consequences of the Great Recession in Europe, which has pushed a great number of young adults out of the EU labour market. During the same period education attainment increased, such that the share of young adults who hold a tertiary education degree was 26.8 per cent, more than a quarter of the entire population. The progress registered during this period is very relevant, with an almost linear increase which reached 9.2 per cent in 2014. When examining ESL and NEET rates over the period, we found both indicators were at a similar level (15 per cent), although the pattern of the evolution is very different. ESL seems to have decreased linearly from 2009 until 2014, while NEET has followed a pattern similar to YUR – although the size of the coefficients differs – decreasing between 2006 and 2008 and then increasing after the Great Recession.

Figure 9.4: YUR, % population, aged 15–24
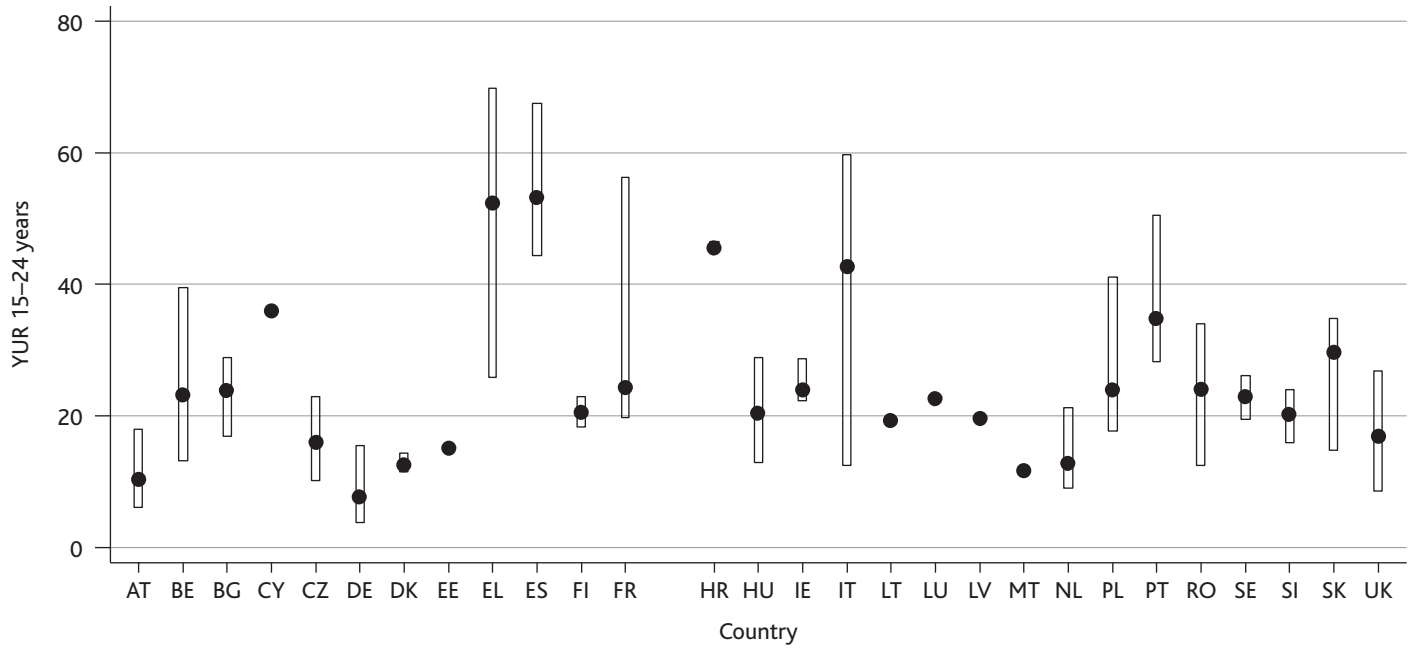
Figure 9.5: NEET, % population, aged 18–24
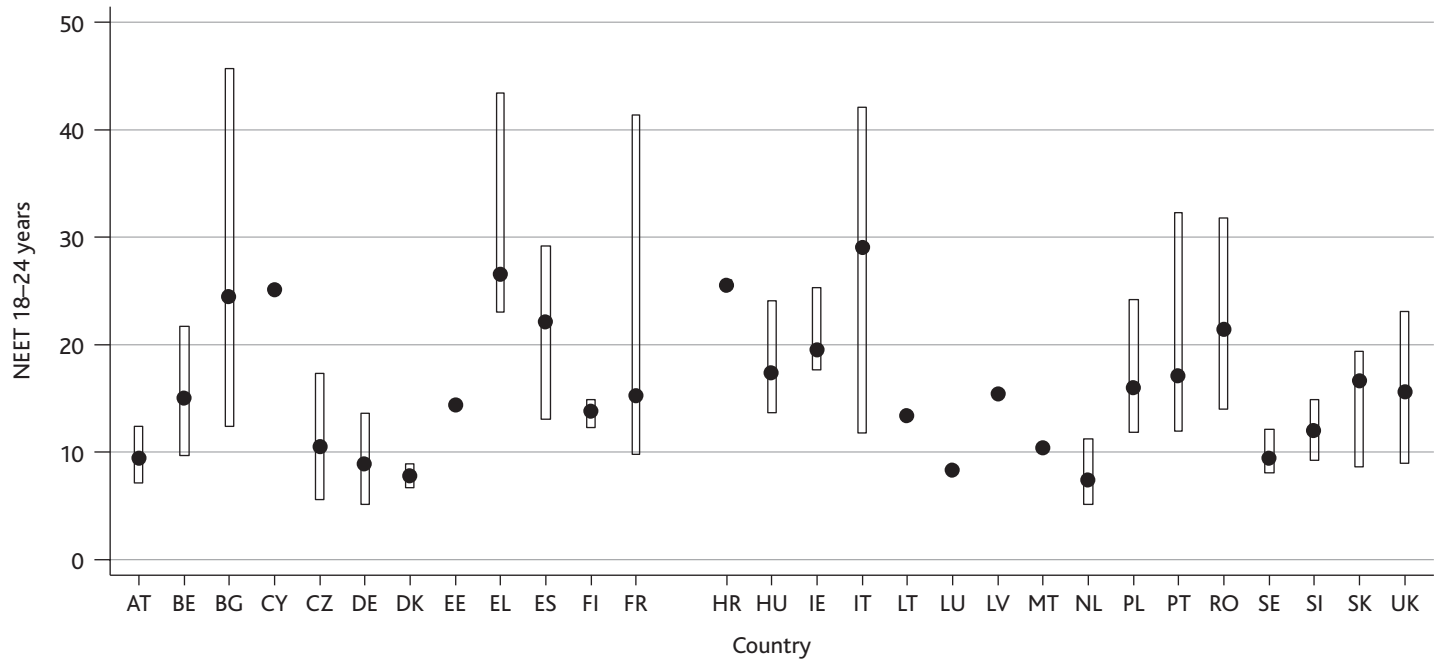
Table 9.1: Annual average changes for NUTS 2 regions since 2006

Variables	(1) YUR, 15–24 years	(2) TEA, 30–34 years	(3) ESL, 18–24 years	(4) NEET, 18–24 years
2006	−1.271***	1.084***	−0.206	−1.215***
	(0.226)	(0.175)	(0.135)	(0.140)
2007	−3.350***	1.996***	−0.00221	−1.702***
	(0.318)	(0.239)	(0.220)	(0.235)
2008	−3.288***	3.298***	−0.341	−1.842***
	(0.412)	(0.244)	(0.228)	(0.289)
2009	0.851	4.566***	−0.969***	0.125
	(0.520)	(0.287)	(0.244)	(0.322)
2010	2.604***	5.422***	−1.215***	0.700**
	(0.553)	(0.279)	(0.241)	(0.323)
2011	3.861***	6.298***	−1.750***	1.053***
	(0.639)	(0.320)	(0.286)	(0.356)
2012	6.072***	7.466***	−2.472***	1.603***
	(0.752)	(0.348)	(0.296)	(0.369)
2013	6.906***	8.193***	−3.210***	1.548***
	(0.807)	(0.366)	(0.304)	(0.382)
2014	5.227***	9.231***	−3.979***	0.810**
	(0.797)	(0.415)	(0.324)	(0.365)
2015	3.785***			0.303
	(0.788)			(0.363)
Constant	19.99***	26.87***	15.18***	15.75***
	(0.622)	(0.634)	(0.538)	(0.428)
Observations	2,770	2,552	2,496	2,853
Number of NUTS 2	271	261	261	272

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$.

Table 9.2 presents estimates of a simple version of this model, including and omitting country fixed effects. In our specifications we include the persistence term for every indicator at the beginning of the period (e.g. 2006). All the models show strong persistence effects. Interpreted as a predictive model, it suggests that in the absence of any other influences the YUR in 2014 will amount to approximately 82 per cent of the level of YUR in 2006. However, the R^2 varies depending on the indicator. Persistence effects only explain 39 per cent of the variation in youth unemployment. However, these can explain more than two thirds of the variation in NEET rates and educational attainment.

Table 9.2: Persistence (or elasticity) over the selected period

Variables	(1) YUR	(2) YUR	(3) TEA	(4) TEA	(5) ESL	(6) ESL	(7) NEET	(8) NEET
YUR, 2006	0.823***	0.656***						
	(0.0577)	(0.0456)						
TEA, 2006			0.573***	0.716***				
			(0.0251)	(0.0362)				
ESL, 2006					0.709***	0.765***		
					(0.0257)	(0.0461)		
NEET, 2006							0.765***	0.666***
							(0.0424)	(0.0424)
Constant	0.732***	0.813***	1.684***	1.486***	0.504***	0.148	0.714***	0.719***
	(0.174)	(0.120)	(0.0850)	(0.118)	(0.0700)	(0.129)	(0.114)	(0.0998)
Observations	271	271	261	261	261	261	272	272
R^2	0.391	0.925	0.653	0.838	0.677	0.801	0.452	0.881
Country FE	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
R^2 Adj	0.390	0.924	0.653	0.837	0.677	0.799	0.452	0.879

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$. FE: fixed effects; R^2: coefficient of determination.

In the second specification of this model we control for country fixed effects, which soak out the unobserved heterogeneity, removing the first difference among the countries considered. The persistence is reduced to 65 per cent. However, the overall variance explained increased and now approaches 1, which demonstrates that the confluence of the regional past and the country-level present dominate the development of young adults' contextual living conditions. The sizes of the persistence effects differ across the indicators selected; however, these are very high: 71.6 per cent for TEA, 76.5 per cent for ESL and 66.6 per cent for NEET, when country fixed effects are included. These show how strongly the initial level of such indicators impacted the 2014 level, showing very high path dependency in young adults across European regions.

Conclusion

This chapter emphasizes the relevance of contextual living conditions in shaping the structures of opportunities for young adults in different regional settings. It provides synthetic information on different dimensions that can be usefully related to LLL policy-making and to the impact of such interventions. Given its broad range, the secondary data analysis presented has to be seen as a contribution to a wider strategy integrating quantitative results as a basis for the institutional and policy analysis carried out in YOUNG_ADULLLT (Scandurra et al, 2018).

The research uses harmonized quantitative data on the mediating role of LLL policies in the configuration of individuals' living conditions, getting as close as possible to the regional level using pre-existing data sets. Furthermore, it explores data gaps in the European Statistical System to complement those data with context-specific information. The findings show that there are huge differences both in the level and dispersal of young adults' living conditions across European territories. However, this evidence is partial and relies on limited and aggregate information.

We focus our attention on four indicators: youth unemployment, tertiary education enrolment, ESL and NEET rates. To analyse the determinants of contextual living conditions we designed simple persistence models, attempting to explain the status in 2014 using the observed conditions in 2006. We find strong evidence of path dependency and once we introduce national-level fixed effects the models show an extremely high R^2. Taken together, this indicates that the regional contextual living conditions of young adults are

overwhelmingly dominated by a combination of the region's history and developments at the national level. Looking ahead, a historically prosperous region in a positive national context is likely to retain this status, whilst equally, a weak region within a weak national context is likely to remain weak. If policy makers are intending to influence the contextual living conditions of young adults, they need to be aware of this inertia. Policies at the national level can be changed and can be devolved. This could be one way of tackling the inertia, that is, by providing more policy authority to NUTS 2 regions. However, history cannot be changed and therefore policy makers need to take this into account when formulating expectations as to how much transformation can reasonably be expected.

In order to better inform policies, an intense effort is needed to develop richer context-based information at a territorial level below NUTS 2. Highlighting existing data gaps and improving the availability of territorial information are crucial steps to achieving better targeted policy that is not contingent on nation–state-based measures. Due to changing realities, such as internationalisation, Europeanisation and globalisation processes, the use of the national level as a representative unit of account should be questioned, and more localised measures could be useful tools to describe changing social realities.

There is a need to increase social impact by understanding the role of the specific contexts within which measures are implemented. This calls for more contextualized information, which is a prerequisite for regional comparative analysis and more targeted and evidence-based policy. Moreover, to develop a broader interpretative framework, it is necessary to tap new data sources that are not strictly based on existing measures of education and labour market status. A holistic approach to living conditions is needed, particularly in a time of socioeconomic changes and reconfiguration of young adults' motivations and aspirations.

Notes

[1] We would like to thank Professor Yuri Kazepov for his collaborative work in the discussion of the theoretical framework for the quantitative analysis of Work Package 4 of the YOUNG_ADULLLT project.

[2] Detailed information about the territorial division of the European territory can be found at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/background. According to Eurostat, NUTS 1 corresponds to major socioeconomic regions; NUTS 2 are basic regions for the application of regional policies; and NUTS 3 are small regions for specific diagnoses, generally metropolitan areas.

3   As a matter of clarification, we are considering territorial unit as defined by the Eurostat classification system as explained in the previous section.

4   The coefficient of variation is a measure of general entropy, which represents the variability in relation to the mean of the population. It is also known as the relative standard deviation.

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Annex

See Tables 9.A1 and 9.A2.

Table 9.A1: Summary statistics of selected indicators

Country	ESL, 18–24 years					NEET, 18–24 years				
	Mean	CV	MAX	MIN	SD	Mean	CV	MAX	MIN	SD
AT	7.00	0.23	9.00	4.70	1.63	9.40	0.19	12.40	7.10	1.75
BE	9.80	0.36	15.20	5.40	3.53	15.00	0.26	21.70	9.70	3.95
BG	12.90	0.40	20.80	5.90	5.15	24.50	0.45	45.70	12.40	10.96
CY	6.80	–	6.80	6.80	–	25.10	–	25.10	25.10	–
CZ	5.50	0.58	12.80	2.50	3.19	10.50	0.33	17.30	5.60	3.45
DE	9.50	0.26	14.00	5.40	2.47	8.90	0.26	13.60	5.10	2.31
DK	7.80	0.10	9.00	7.00	0.76	7.80	0.13	8.90	6.60	1.00
EE	11.40	–	11.40	11.40	–	14.40	–	14.40	14.40	–
EL	9.00	0.42	14.20	6.30	3.81	26.50	0.23	43.40	23.00	6.13
ES	21.90	0.29	32.10	9.40	6.24	22.10	0.21	29.20	13.00	4.61
FI	9.50	0.23	12.40	7.90	2.16	13.80	0.09	14.90	12.30	1.19
FR	9.00	0.26	15.00	4.20	2.32	15.20	0.53	41.40	9.80	8.06
HR	2.70	0.21	3.00	2.20	0.57	25.50	0.02	26.00	25.30	0.49
HU	11.40	0.35	18.40	7.20	3.96	17.40	0.25	24.10	13.60	4.31
IE	6.90	0.35	9.40	6.00	2.40	19.50	0.28	25.30	17.60	5.44
IT	15.00	0.30	24.00	8.40	4.44	29.00	0.28	42.10	11.70	7.99
LT	5.90	–	5.90	5.90	–	13.40	–	13.40	13.40	–
LU	6.10	–	6.10	6.10	–	8.30	–	8.30	8.30	–
LV	8.50	–	8.50	8.50	–	15.40	–	15.40	15.40	–
MT	20.30	–	20.30	20.30	–	10.40	–	10.40	10.40	–
NL	8.70	0.28	14.20	6.00	2.45	7.40	0.30	11.20	5.10	2.21
PL	5.40	0.46	10.70	3.30	2.46	16.00	0.22	24.20	11.80	3.48
PT	17.40	0.37	32.80	14.00	6.38	17.10	0.41	32.30	11.90	7.09
RO	18.10	0.31	25.00	9.00	5.55	21.40	0.33	31.80	14.00	7.12
SE	6.70	0.10	7.90	5.60	0.67	9.40	0.13	12.10	8.00	1.21
SI	4.40	–	–	–	–	12.00	0.34	14.90	9.20	4.03
SK	6.70	0.32	9.10	4.80	2.15	16.60	0.30	19.40	8.60	5.03
UK	11.80	0.27	19.50	7.20	3.16	15.60	0.22	23.10	8.90	3.42

Note: ESL: early school-leavers; NEET: not in employment, education and training; CV: coefficient of variation; MAX: maximum value; MIN: minimum value; SD: standard deviation; GDP: Gross Domestic Product; ISCED: International Standard Classification of Education.

Country	Youth unemployment, 15–24 years					Ed. attainment 30–34 ISCED 5–8				
	Mean	CV	MAX	MIN	SD	Mean	CV	MAX	MIN	SD
AT	10.30	0.41	18.00	6.00	4.25	40.00	0.16	50.40	31.40	6.21
BE	23.20	0.40	39.50	13.20	9.17	43.80	0.15	55.50	34.00	6.39
BG	23.80	0.20	28.90	16.80	4.66	30.90	0.27	43.00	21.70	8.40
CY	36.00	–	36.00	36.00	–	52.50	–	52.50	52.50	–
CZ	15.90	0.24	22.90	10.10	3.84	28.20	0.31	45.00	16.00	8.72
DE	7.70	0.35	15.50	3.70	2.69	31.40	0.21	45.50	20.40	6.64
DK	12.60	0.08	14.30	11.50	1.00	44.90	0.25	59.30	31.10	11.10
EE	15.00	–	15.00	15.00	–	43.20	–	43.20	43.20	–
EL	52.40	0.21	69.80	25.80	10.88	37.20	0.26	45.70	24.30	9.52
ES	53.20	0.13	67.50	44.40	6.73	42.30	0.21	58.50	22.60	9.04
FI	20.50	0.10	22.90	18.30	2.07	45.30	0.14	53.10	38.00	6.54
FR	24.30	0.43	56.30	19.70	10.54	43.70	0.17	60.50	31.20	7.29
HR	45.50	0.02	46.50	45.00	1.06	32.20	0.04	32.70	31.10	1.13
HU	20.40	0.30	28.90	12.80	6.05	34.10	0.25	48.70	25.40	8.48
IE	23.90	0.19	28.70	22.30	4.53	52.20	0.12	54.20	45.40	6.22
IT	42.70	0.29	59.70	12.40	12.53	23.90	0.17	31.60	17.40	4.15
LT	19.30	–	19.30	19.30	–	53.30	–	53.30	53.30	–
LU	22.60	–	22.60	22.60	–	52.70	–	52.70	52.70	–
LV	19.60	–	19.60	19.60	–	39.90	–	39.90	39.90	–
MT	11.70	–	11.70	11.70	–	26.50	–	26.50	26.50	–
NL	12.70	0.24	21.20	9.00	3.10	44.80	0.20	58.50	28.60	9.06
PL	23.90	0.24	41.10	17.70	5.68	42.10	0.14	56.60	28.70	5.89
PT	34.80	0.21	50.50	28.20	7.40	31.30	0.21	40.10	23.70	6.49
RO	24.00	0.34	34.00	12.40	8.22	25.00	0.39	47.60	17.60	9.77
SE	22.90	0.10	26.10	19.40	2.29	49.90	0.14	58.00	38.00	6.97
SI	20.20	0.28	24.00	15.90	5.73	41.00	–	–	–	–
SK	29.70	0.31	34.80	14.70	9.23	26.90	0.58	54.00	20.20	15.68
UK	16.90	0.24	26.80	8.60	4.08	47.70	0.15	60.70	31.60	7.28

Table 9.A2: List of variables

Variables	Category	Dimension
GDP at current market prices, euro per inhabitant	GDP and economic growth	ECONOMICS
Total intramural R&D expenditure in all sectors	Innovation	ECONOMICS
Researchers in all sectors as a % of total employment	Innovation	ECONOMICS
Motorways, total line, (1000/km²)	Infrastructure asset	ECONOMICS
Railways, total line, (1000/km²)	Infrastructure asset	ECONOMICS
Old dependency ratio, 2nd variant (65+ to population 15–64)	Pop. structure	DEMOGRAPHY
Median age of the population	Pop. structure	DEMOGRAPHY
Students at ISCED 5–6 as a percentage of population 20–24 years	Access	EDUCATION AND TRAINING
Students at ISCED 0–6 in all levels of education % of total population	Access	EDUCATION AND TRAINING
Students aged 17 (all ISCED levels) % of corresponding age population	Access	EDUCATION AND TRAINING
Early leavers from education and training (18–24 years), %	Transition from education to employment	EDUCATION AND TRAINING
NEET (people aged 15–24), %	Transition from education to employment	EDUCATION AND TRAINING
NEET (people aged 18–24), %	Transition from education to employment	EDUCATION AND TRAINING
Population (25–64) with ISCED 3–4, %, total	Upp. secondary attainment	EDUCATION AND TRAINING
Population (30–34) with ISCED 0–2, %, total	Primary and secondary attainment	EDUCATION AND TRAINING

(continued)

Variables	Category	Dimension
Population (25–64) with ISCED 0–2, %, total	Primary and secondary attainment	EDUCATION AND TRAINING
Population (25–64) with ISCED 3–4, %, total	Upp. secondary attainment	EDUCATION AND TRAINING
Population with ISCED 3–4 (30–34 years), total %	Upp. secondary attainment	EDUCATION AND TRAINING
Population (25–64) with ISCED 5–8, %, total	Tertiary attainment	EDUCATION AND TRAINING
Population with ISCED 5–8 (30–34 years), total %	Tertiary attainment	EDUCATION AND TRAINING
Employment rate (25–54)	Employment	LABOUR MARKET
Employment rate (15–24)	Employment	LABOUR MARKET
Employment rate since education completion (five years), 20–34 years	Employment	LABOUR MARKET
Weekly hours of work in main job, 15–24 years	Typology of employment	LABOUR MARKET
Weekly hours of work in main job, 25–64 years	Typology of employment	LABOUR MARKET
Disposable income, net. PPS based on final consumption, per inhabitant	Disposable income	MATERIAL CONDITIONS
Population at risk of poverty or social exclusion, %	Poverty	MATERIAL CONDITIONS
At risk of poverty rate, % of population	Poverty	MATERIAL CONDITIONS
Severe material deprivation rate	Poverty	MATERIAL CONDITIONS
Life expectancy in age, more than a year	Life expectancy	HEALTH
Infant mortality rate	Infant mortality	HEALTH

The changing meanings of lifelong learning policies: consequences for young adults and their life courses

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Introduction

Policies in general, and lifelong learning (LLL) policies in particular, have multiple meanings (Ball, 1993; Schuetze and Casey, 2006). They change across time, space, theoretical perspectives, and with regard to the types of actors that seek to make sense of them. This challenges the development of a research framework capable of capturing the myriad of understandings of LLL 'policy'. Furthermore, it defies coordinated policy-making and the assessment of its effects. This chapter aims to gauge such diversity and discuss its consequences for European young adults and their life courses.

   We begin by clarifying the notion of 'policies' used throughout the chapter. To take due account of the diversity mentioned earlier, we address different forms of policies, both in terms of materiality level (low to high) and initiating agents (formal to informal). Next, we sketch the history of LLL policy-making from the 1970s until now, namely the shift from lifelong education to LLL. Here we highlight the expansion from a humanistic focus on personal development and the democratisation of education to a utilitarian emphasis on economic growth and individual employability. This is further explored through a discussion of tensions in the contemporary 'growth and inclusion' agenda in the so-called 'knowledge-based economy', echoed in the Lisbon Strategy, the plan devised in 2000 for the development of the economy of the European Union (EU) between 2000 and 2010 (European Parliament, 2000). The local assessment of these implications in nine European countries enables a comparative approach that renders common issues and diverging developments visible.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the tensions within the 'growth and inclusion' agenda are articulated with the shift from standardisation towards de-standardisation in the lives of young adults. We seek not only to provide an answer to: (1) how de-standardisation is considered in European LLL policies, but also (2) how such policies impact and transform the lives of young adults.

The changing meaning of LLL policies

It is necessary to begin by clarifying the use of the term 'policy' in YOUNG_ADULLLT. Contrary to more common usage, namely in the field of political science, its meaning is not confined to the actual content of actual political decisions and regulations nor to proposals for alternative legislation. Indeed, to make sense of LLL at the functional region (FR) level – the level at which empirical work was undertaken in the project – it was necessary to broaden the definition. This expansion occurs in three dimensions:

- policies are seen as ranging from low to high levels of materiality and concreteness, that is to say from discourses to concrete measures, there is a wide range of products/activities we count as policies;
- both products/activities that are formally initiated and run by a single institution or a group of institutions and those that are more informally started and run by networks can be regarded as policies (Kotthoff et al, 2017);
- specifically regarding LLL policies, it can be argued that this definition is wide because it goes beyond the educational field to encompass the youth and labour market sectors. Thus, for YOUNG_ADULLLT:

> LLL policies can be defined as any effort to educate young adults in the three policy fields, independently from the content or the format of the educational measure. The precondition is that a political actor has to be involved, be it in the form of generating public discourses in the field of education or in the form of commissioning concrete educational measures. (Kotthoff et al, 2017: 6)

Let us now go through each of the three dimensions of expansion in more detail. First, the consideration of different levels of materiality is an approach grounded on recent socio-material approaches to LLL (Fenwick and Edwards, 2011, 2013). It can be argued that the

greatest originality of such approaches resides in reclaiming the role of materials and materiality in the social life, ceasing to regard them either as the mere background against which human activity unfolds or merely as products of human agency (Fenwick and Edwards, 2013: 49–50). Instead, the focus is on the 'specific materializing processes through which policymaking actually works to animate educational knowledge, identities, and practices' (Fenwick and Edwards, 2011: 710). Policies, then, materialise at different levels; that is, they 'incarnate' in different planes, from low (for example, the discourses about the knowledge-based economy) to high materiality (for example, the forms young adults need to fill in to apply for a training course, or the training course itself). Conversely, those materials shape the practices and knowledge they enable. An analogy with Stephen Ball's (1993) distinction between policy as a text and as a discourse can be found here. In his now famous text, Ball draws on Foucault's (1994) generative understanding of power to conceive of discourses as creators of possibilities and impossibilities for thought, and of texts as encoded representations resulting from a history of both material and interpretive struggles. Thus, from Foucault's conception of power/knowledge to Ball's distinction between policies as text and as discourse, through to socio-material approaches to LLL, there is an immanent relationality between a matrix of (im)possibilities and its materialisation at different levels. It is this relationality that YOUNG_ADULLLT seeks to grasp and portray.

Second, taking due account of the varying planes and degrees of materialisation requires regarding policies as both products and activities that are formally or informally initiated and run either by a single institution (for example, the Ministry of Education) or by networks (for example, the SANQ Report [Forecasting System of Qualifications' Needs Report], which in the Portuguese FR of Vale do Ave is elaborated under the coordination of the respective intermunicipal community). This has two clear advantages for YOUNG_ADULLLT: one, it enables acknowledgement of a wide range of LLL products and activities in the FRs under analysis; two, it is an interpretation that is highly compatible with the governance approach, which is one of the main theoretical tenets of this project (Kotthoff et al, 2017: 6).

Finally, the third dimension of our broad understanding of LLL policies refers to going beyond the educational field to include the youth and labour market sectors. This option is grounded in the acknowledgement that contemporary LLL policies, whether as 'discourse' or as 'text' (Ball, 1993), tie those three sectors together.

Indeed, as argued by Biesta (2006) and others, we are living in a learning economy that is increasingly driven by the need for countries and regions to remain competitive in a globalised world. In this context, 'employability' and 'activation' have become commonplace strategies for achieving collective economic goals and dealing with social problems, even if, in fact, they place the burden of responsibility on individuals rather than on society. Thus, education is inextricably related not only to the economy – namely to the labour market – but also to youth and social inclusion issues. This has led Aspin and Chapman to speak of the '"triadic" nature of lifelong learning: for economic progress and development; for personal development and fulfilment; for social inclusiveness and democratic understanding and activity' (2010: 17).

This drive towards a learning economy produces a shift from a humanistic, collectivistic focus on personal development and the democratisation of education to a utilitarian, individualistic emphasis on economic growth and individual employability. In other words, LLL shifts from being regarded as 'a personal good and [...] an inherent aspect of democratic life [to being] understood in terms of the formation of human capital and as an investment in economic development' (Biesta, 2006: 169). Thus, LLL, once regarded as a right focused on personal development, is now understood as a duty focused on engaging in socially useful learning. A change of this magnitude impacts the very nature and meaning of LLL policies, and has led Biesta to shrewdly ask: 'who has the (democratic) right to define the "agenda" for lifelong learning' (2006: 170) and 'what is the point of lifelong learning [...] if the purpose of lifelong learning cannot be defined by the individual learner[?]' (2006: 176).

From lifelong education to LLL

In this section we deal with the shift from lifelong education to lifelong learning. While the notion of lifelong education is not new, as shown by several authors (Canário, 2003; Fernandez, 2006; Lima, 2016), the modern concept of lifelong education did not emerge until the early 1970s. This happened in the context of the breakdown and criticism of the school model whose expansion, in the 1950s and 1960s, was unable to create a more socially just and cohesive society. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's publication of the report *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow* (Faure et al, 1972) represented a turning point in thinking about education. In addition to expounding a critique of the formal education school model, the report recovered the idea of education as

a *continuum* process from birth to death, which can be associated with human existence and the development of the individual. Therefore, it is not surprising that an aim of education is 'to enable man [sic] to be himself, to "become himself"' (Faure et al, 1972: xxxi).

Lifelong education corresponds to an educational project that associates the individual and social dimensions of education within the framework of a humanistic and democratic system of collective values. Strongly influenced by the social justice agenda, lifelong education is seen as a 'lever for empowerment and emancipation' (Biesta, 2006: 117). Regarding social and educational change: 'it is out of question for education to be confined, as in the past, to training the leaders of tomorrow's society […] education is no longer the privilege of an elite' (Faure et al, 1972: 160). The educational city and the learning society are the fundamental elements for revolutionising the educational system (Tuschling and Engemann, 2006) and fulfilling the social change 'whose main proposal is to democratize education and democracy itself' (Barros, 2012: 129).

The lifelong education movement is contemporary with other critical thinking currents that challenge the formal education school model. Philosopher Ivan Illich, in the name of a new idea of society, radically developed a systematic argument about the need to disestablish the school institution in order to deschool society (Illich, 1971). From another theoretical approach, Paulo Freire criticised the banking conception of education, opposing it to a liberating education that would be capable of helping individuals to 'read' and transform the world (Freire, 1975, 1977).

Despite the difficulty in implementing lifelong education in terms of policies and practices, the conception of education it advocates enables dialectically integrating different education modalities and processes; criticises the school model; consolidates the principle of equal educational opportunities; promotes individual and collective autonomy from a perspective of social transformation rather than simple adaptation; transforms education into an act among subjects rather than an object-based task.

This humanistic approach, focused on personal development and democratisation, has now been replaced by an instrumental and utilitarian one that emphasises individual employability and economic growth. The current, insistent discourses about the importance and aims of LLL, as well as the allocation of financial resources, could be interpreted as a rise in the ideals of lifelong education. However, this is not the case. The importance currently attributed to LLL is rooted in a perspective in which education is determined by economic logic

and social control, in what Griffin (1999) calls a welfare state reform strategy. Indeed, the supporters of neoliberal reform models argue that the current crisis of education is a result of the crisis of the welfare state. According to them, the intervention of the state in education has helped to: increase bureaucratic control; limit freedom of choice; emphasise quantity in access to education rather than quality of educational success; overrate the social dimension of education in comparison to training for a job, economic growth and productivity; and assign unlimited power to teachers and pedagogy, to the detriment of stakeholders, socioeconomic needs and, most of all, entrepreneurs (Lima, 2016). LLL emerges precisely to provide an answer to some of those problems.

This instrumental conception of LLL is well documented in several documents produced by the European Commission (1995, 2001a, 2001b) between the late 20th century and the beginning of the new millennium. The 'Teaching and Learning: Towards a Learning Society' report states that 'the development of a broad knowledge base, namely the ability to grasp the meaning of things, to comprehend and make judgments, is the first factor in adapting to economic and labour market change' (EC, 1995: 10). At the same time, the end of the debate on educational principles is decreed (EC, 1995: 22). According to this new narrative, the contradictions between a broad knowledge base and training for employment, as well as the cultural and ideological barriers that separated education from the companies' world could be overcome.

Presenting themselves as ideologically neutral and apolitical, the new LLL policies aim at promoting the functional adaptation of individual learners to employability, flexibility and economic competitiveness within the framework of the 'learning society' and the 'knowledge economy'. This contributes to social cohesion by combating exclusion through social and educational policies and programmes targeting young people in vulnerable situations (NEETs [neither in employment nor in education and training], migrants, women, unemployed, under-skilled workers) and promoting individual employability. In fact, these are the objectives of almost all LLL policies analysed in YOUNG_ADULLLT (see Kotthoff et al, 2017).

The current hegemony of the concept of LLL is indebted to the transformations in late modernity. For Green (2002), the current importance of LLL policies stems from three structural factors: the aging of the population, cultural and social changes and the process of globalisation.

The aging population has had a profound effect on the educational sphere. On the one hand, it has changed the age composition on

the educational demand side and, on the other hand, the aging of the working population has imposed an increased effort to upgrade and update skills. Finally, the rise of the age dependency ratio 'places immense pressures on public expenditure budgets, thus raising constant demands for measures to increase efficiency and reduce costs in education and elsewhere' (Green, 2002: 613).

Cultural and lifestyle changes also place educational systems under pressure. The emergence of counter-hegemonic cultures that criticise globalisation, the cultural diversity resulting from large-scale migratory flows and a plurality of lifestyles are accompanied by increased social fragmentation, individualisation, risk and uncertainty. LLL policies seek to respond to these changes by providing flexible learning opportunities. Individuals, in their turn, are expected to take 'responsibility for constructing their own learning pathways and sustaining their own employability' (Green, 2002: 618) through a never-ending process of accumulating competences and skills adapted to labour market needs.

In its turn, the economic globalisation process has placed enormous pressure on educational systems and contributed to increasing economic competition among countries and regions. It is in this context that companies have been introducing information technology into their production processes and implementing multiple strategies: downsizing, outsourcing and ensuring industrial relations are flexible. As Green pointed out, 'even for the lower skilled workers, this means the need for new competencies in computer skills as well as attitudes and values that predispose them to being flexible' (2002: 615). LLL policies aim at responding to such economic challenges by adopting a managerial approach to education, strongly anchored in human capital theory. In this approach, individuals tend to be conceived as a kind of raw material, as objects capable of being moulded and being accommodating, with some seen as 'incompetent' individuals, with deficits and gaps that require the acquisition of skills, competencies and abilities that will enable them to engage actively with the new 'knowledge economy'.

LLL policies also prize non-formal and informal education, albeit from a different perspective than lifelong education. Within LLL policies, these are a way to reduce the costs associated with the skill formation system. It is in this context of cost reduction that Green explains the diffusion of the idea of the learning society:

> When the state can no longer pay for the quantities of learning required, it invents the learning society so that the

costs can be shared. […] The learning society is, thus, both the most affordable and most responsive way to meet the learning demands of the knowledge economy, as far as the national governments are concerned. (2002: 617)

LLL policies and discourses are powerful technologies that create a new subject capable of effectively responding to the demands of the 'new spirit of capitalism'. Critical thinking, autonomy, responsibility, adaptability, flexibility are no longer the core skills essential to the integral development of the human being, participation in society and the exercise of citizenship. Instead, they are now seen as the qualities required for a 'good worker' in the era of flexible capitalism (Rambla et al, 2018). Therefore, LLL is 'a mode of social control that acts as a new disciplinary technology to make people more compliant and adaptable for work' (Crowther, 2004: 125). People are expected to accept, without resistance, new forms of flexible rationalisation and *flexploitation*, which Bourdieu defines as a 'new mode of domination based on the creation of a generalised and permanent state of insecurity aimed at forcing workers into submission, into the acceptance of exploitation' (1998: 85).

LLL actively participates in the making of both a new social, political and economic order and of a new subject. It shifts the responsibility of economic failure from the system to the individuals, converting economic and social problems into educational ones. It undermines the humanistic and political role of education, replacing it with a technical–managerial conception of learning subordinated to the needs of late capitalism. It participates in redefining citizens as consumers rather than political actors. It transforms human beings into knowledgeable subjects engaged in an endless process of skills' acquisition to compete in the labour market and keep their position in society. In sum, and quoting Crowther:

> Lifelong learning is shifting the responsibility for learning to individuals, undermining welfare, disguising the reduction of the democratic public sphere, and working on people as objects of policy to ensure their compliance with the brave new world of flexible capitalism. (2004: 130)

Tensions in the Lisbon Strategy

This section identifies and discusses tensions in the contemporary 'growth and inclusion' agenda of the so-called 'knowledge-based

economy' envisaged by the Lisbon Strategy (European Parliament, 2000). Through a comparative approach, the implications of these tensions are assessed in the nine European countries that make up the YOUNG_ADULLLT consortium. It should be made clear that this comparative approach is grounded on three different theoretical perspectives that, as mentioned earlier, form the conceptual basis of YOUNG_ADULLLT: governance, cultural political economy (CPE) and life course research (LCR) (see Chapter 1, in this volume). This combination of different theoretical perspectives enables a wider and polychrome picture to be drawn of LLL policies and their consequences for young adults. Governance (Bevir, 2011) specifically, drives our attention towards the vertical and horizontal relationships (including tensional ones) between state and non-state actors involved in defining and implementing LLL policies. In its turn, the CPE (Jessop, 2009) highlights the role of contextually embedded ideas and perceptions in policy dynamics and outcomes. As such, it is helpful to understand how LLL policies construct target groups and envisage their effects. Finally, LCR (Heinz et al, 2009), which considers the embedment of the lives of individuals in macro frames such as the labour market, is of crucial importance in providing an answer to how LLL policies impact the life courses of young adults.

Decentralisation: a pathway for deregulation and privatisation or for democratic policy-making?

In most of YOUNG_ADULLLT's FRs, the main tension identified refers to the extent to which the publicly funded skills formation system should be oriented to serve the needs of private employers, even if that promotes youth employment. While most public institutions seem to fund and support general skills, private employers are more interested in industry- or firm-specific skills. This contrast seems to be clearer in FRs where there is a predominant economic sector (e.g. oil, tourism, mines). At the same time, in almost all the FRs, employers and some street-level professionals stated that young adults lack soft skills. This seems to hide a deep mismatch between employability skills and labour market demands. In some regions, policies are directed at increasing industry-specific skills in order to improve the employability of young adults (e.g. Girona in Spain, Genoa in Italy, Istria in Croatia), while stakeholders in other regions are focused on the weakness of labour market opportunities (e.g. Aberdeen in Scotland, Blagoevgrad in Bulgaria, Kainuu in Finland) (Palumbo et al, 2018).

The conflict between supply and demand seems to be easing where there is a well-defined labour market, with organised stakeholders (where a public authority has a strong leading role) or where there are person-centred policies. In one initiative, the Italian good practice called 'Dote Unica' (Single Endowment) (Milan FR), people have a personal budget that they can spend on training, placements, internships and entrepreneurship schemes. The budget assigned to each individual (not just young adults, as this policy is open to everybody) depends on their particular situation, taking into account factors such as the time they have spent out of work, age, qualifications and gender. The ultimate goal is to support people throughout their working lives. Another relevant initiative that deals with both the demand and the supply sides is the Vienna Employment Promotion Fund (WAFF): in this case, unemployed people are funded to undergo education and training in order to align their skills with the ones demanded by the labour market (Palumbo et al, 2018).

Certainly, one of the greatest tensions found in YOUNG_ADULLLT's FRs concerns the financing of the vocational education and training (VET) system, in particular the availability of the European Social Fund (ESF) and their ability to manage it. In the FR of Malaga, for example, the mismanagement of European funds has even led to the closure of important employability measures, while in Austria – in particular in Vienna – since the region's policies for disadvantaged people share funds with refugees and non-EU migrants, tensions have grown among beneficiaries. In the FR of Istria, in Croatia, the scarcity of funding ultimately means that only young people who have private resources manage to undertake VET if they were unable to finish vocational school as regular students or wish to attend additional higher secondary school programmes. Thus, disadvantaged people struggle to improve their employability. In general, there is a wide dependence on ESF: a number of FRs have mentioned the importance of ESF for the regional VET system (e.g. Blagoevgrad in Bulgaria), without the programme, youth opportunities in the region would be very limited or even non-existent.

In conclusion, there is a fundamental tension between whether the decentralisation process is a real chance for collaborative and democratic policy-making and decision-making at the local and regional levels or, instead, because of a less substantial state intervention, it ends up creating more room for privatisation, deregulation and exclusion.

Matching supply and demand: who defines what, and how?

Our analysis also sought to understand the interactions among actors and institutions based on the discursive and material factors that shape them. In that sense, it was interesting to consider how actors construct and define problems and target groups. Challenges for given targeted groups are usually detected when changes are experienced at the local/regional/national/supranational levels (variation). The activities/policies that actors decide to take part in (selection) and promote (retention) at the different levels are influenced by their problematisation of the situation of the targeted group (Ribeiro et al, 2017). The selection and retention of discourses highlighted a fundamental node: the so-called 'street-level professionals'. There are a large number of actors such as teachers, social workers, psychologists, job centre operators, tutors, counsellors and others who establish daily rapport with young adults and have to 'translate' policies into concrete action. In some cases, such actors are in a precarious situation and struggling with difficulties, while in other cases they are professionals closer to decision makers. In any case, the 'funnel' of decision-making is often through these actors: frequently they are working within contradictory guidelines (Lipsky, 1969), with a potential conflict between beneficiaries and incongruous procedures. Street-level professionals develop their own perceptions and routines in order to solve the contradictions and ambiguities in their mandate. These constructions often have a strong impact on the social image of the beneficiaries (Rambla et al, 2018). Importantly, while the bulk of employment-centred LLL policies consider that the predicaments of street-level professionals eventually threaten policy effectiveness, these predicaments are nothing but the common challenges of educational interaction.

An important discourse throughout YOUNG_ADULLLT is the soft skills rhetoric: on the one hand, soft skills (communications, emotional intelligence, self-motivation, problem-solving, time management) are essential, yet, according to employers, very difficult to find. At the same time, however, soft skills seem to be somewhat evanescent and not useful to teach in training courses or in education. In that sense, soft skills are personal and non-communicable and their lack is more a personal fault than a gap to be filled.

Another relevant discourse is related to the fact that vocational education is not prestigious and is less valued than a standard academic path. This stereotype seems to be mainstream across Southern Europe.

In the Portuguese case, young adults are conscious that there is a social stigma around VET and feel they have to fight for social recognition. In Italy, the prejudice against VET seems very strong, especially from parents. Parents in Italy try to direct their children to academic studies instead of professional or technical high schools, while in Spain LLL is considered a good choice but simply to fill vocational gaps, and only for people who have significant training shortages. These countries look to Germany as a touchstone, as a model to follow even if other countries (including Germany itself) consider its approach paternalistic and controlling.

A conviction shared by all countries was that young adults, and in particular the beneficiaries of LLL measures, were perceived as weak, unable to find their own path in life without specific public measures. Young adults in particular are regarded as not being able to 'read' labour market dynamics and as needing more support in order to collect and interpret data and trends. In this sense, young adults need to strengthen their ties with the labour market considering the state of affairs identified by Brown and Hesketh: 'The knowledge economy conjures a world of smart people, in smart jobs, doing smart things, in smart ways, for smart money, a world increasingly open to all rather than a few' (2004: 1). Public policies need to be implemented to enhance the match between supply and demand, namely by improving the skills and capabilities of young adults.

In many cases, however, young adults share the impression that they are training for precariousness (Kurki and Brunila, 2014), and that the specific measures aimed at employability, despite providing them with hard and soft skills, do not really help them disentangle the thick meshes of mismatch between the supply and demand of the labour market.

Living the young adult life: dilemmas, dilemmas, dilemmas

Narrowing the research focus down to the individual level elicited four dilemmas. The first is related to the tension between standardised and de-standardised life courses. It is currently widely accepted that the life condition of a young adult is characterised by a de-standardisation of biographies. However, policies (and social expectations) still remain based on the linear three-stage trajectory (education – work – retirement) that emerged in the 20th century. Today, young adults increasingly have a multistage life, with transitions and discontinuities in between. These multistage lives require a new proficiency in

managing transitions and reflexivity, reskilling and building new and diverse networks and careers. The end of linearity is related not only to the school-to-work transition, but also to the personal and private lives of young adults (evidence of this is the fact that, in almost all the FRs analysed, the number of young adults living with their parents is at an all-time high). At the same time, social policies and social expectations seem to have remained anchored in a standardised view of life and every deviation is experienced as a fault – typically, an individual fault – or a problem to solve. Only a few countries support individual trajectories (as we saw before in the cases of 'Dote Unica' in Milan FR, the Finnish Programme and the WAFF in Vienna FR), but even these tailor-made measures have to consider the difficulties and uncertainty in planning for the future.

The second dilemma is connected to the previous one, but it is focused on the perception that young people cannot follow a linear trajectory and policies must intervene to reduce risks of deviations. The transition to adulthood seems to be perilous, and policies assume that school dropout remains a persistent and critical issue in many school systems and a threat to young adults' life courses.

The third dilemma relates to the future: discourses extracted from young adults' interviews show a conflict between plans and dreams. In many cases, young adults prefer to talk about their dreams rather than their projects. Indeed, their design thinking or planning capacity seems to be impaired, weakened as it is by an overloaded information system and the continuous difficulty in seeing their (modest) strategies fulfilled.

The fourth dilemma concerns the relationship between formal and informal learning environments. Young people have to take extensive responsibility for their own life courses and careers, especially for choices about job seeking and education. The individualisation processes seem to lead young people to interpret their situations purely as personal problems rather than public issues. Therefore, they seek to solve the situation more through the adoption of adaptation strategies than through requests for participation in policies' design or monitoring and evaluation.

The individuals' life course is inextricably linked to the passage of time, the different institutions and contexts of regulation (the education and training system, employment, social security) individuals pass through, and individuals' choices and decisions. As stated by Heinz and colleagues (2009: 18) life phases and transitions are 'structured in a reciprocal process of political, social and economic conditions ("historical time", welfare state regulations and provisions ("institutional

time"), and biographical decisions and investments concerning shifting living circumstances ("individual time")'. Unlike traditional societies, in the contemporary knowledge society, individuals must construct their own biographies through action. Thus, individualisation is not really a choice, but rather an existential condition. Furthermore, their biographical trajectories and tailor-made initiatives are overshadowed with new forms of control and new institutional demands. The paradoxes presented previously – standardisation vs de-standardisation, linearity vs risks, plans vs dreams, formal vs informal – make up the scenario in which young adults live. A scenario full of doubts and contradictory expectations.

Conclusion

Policies, and LLL policies in particular, are a contested terrain. As previously mentioned, their meanings have changed radically over the past few decades and, given the challenges and dilemmas currently faced, it is expected that they will continue evolving. Interestingly – and paradoxically – this situation coexists with a major community of states (the EU) having decreed the end of the debate on educational principles (Commission of the European Communities, 1995). To be sure, this is not only an inaccurate portrait of reality, but also a potentially dangerous statement in political terms in the sense that it seems to attempt to sweep under the rug sharp divergences in understandings of education and society. As shown before, despite seeking to present themselves as ideologically neutral and apolitical, the new LLL policies are embedded in an ideological framework and pursue political aims. Indeed, as also stated earlier, given that LLL plays an active role in the making of both a new social order and of a new subject, it does not seem plausible that it might emerge as ideology-free and apolitical. We should be clear: this is not only a fallacy but, given the nature of the world we live in, a fallacy that runs the risk of being pushed forward on a global scale, with global implications. One of those implications is a paradox in itself. While everyone acknowledges that we are living in a new social and economic organisation, policies, for the most part, keep looking at work and jobs as the great – sometimes even the sole – organiser of the individuals' lives. This – like the expectation that individuals will have linear professional trajectories – is clearly out of tune with reality. We would like to argue that this absence of fit with reality plays an important role in explaining why young adults and decision makers seem to lack the knowledge to comfortably navigate through

the challenges posed by the so-called knowledge economy. Indeed, switching the focus to LLL at the expense of lifelong education (in other words, the shift from a humanistic to an economistic approach) has downplayed the inextricable educational component of activities such as elaborating individual life plans, choosing a profession and becoming an active citizen. It has also reinforced the contradiction between a macroeconomic perspective and a context- and person-sensitive humanistic approach. However, the hegemony of the technical-instrumental conception of education that is present in LLL policies is only contested locally by a few dissonant voices: the street-level professionals. It is they who demand policies that take into account the knowledge, life experiences, life projects and living conditions of young adults in vulnerable positions, rejecting the deficit conception that has been underlying their creation. It is also they who appeal for LLL policies aimed at the development of young adults not only as workers but also as human beings.

Understanding the actual place of learning in any given society requires answering what must or should be taught and learned and why. It also requires a broader approach, focusing not only on work but on life itself. Paradoxically, it appears that learning per se is not particularly valued in the 'knowledge society'. Instead, learning and education tend to become an accumulation process, the rationale – or, perhaps, the unjustified hope – of which is that one of its layers will eventually solve the individual's insertion in the labour market and social inclusion. Meanwhile, what happens is that, because they are financially cornered, young adults become politically disengaged and struggle to commit to plans in a scenario of contradictory expectations. This is all the more so because, while policies do materialise at different levels – that is, they 'incarnate' in different planes – they are yet to incarnate in young adults' ability to participate in their design, assessment or monitoring.

In conclusion, most of the LLL policies analysed in YOUNG_ ADULLLT show an inability to incorporate in their design and practices the de-standardisation of young adults' life courses and their expectations. The few that have a person-centred approach deal with the risks of the increasing tendency to transform education and training into private goods and learners into consumers, reinforcing the privatisation of skills formation systems. Finally, along with the dilemmas and paradoxes discussed throughout this text, if on the one hand LLL policies can have a positive impact in young people's lives, on the other hand they may be participating in the construction of domesticated citizens and workers, compliant with the new spirit of

capitalism. Therefore, they need to enhance their context-sensitivity and strike a finer balance between economic and humanistic concerns.

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Telling the story: exploring lifelong learning policies for young adults through a narrative approach

Mauro Palumbo, Sebastiano Benasso and Marcelo Parreira do Amaral

Introduction

Policy analysis has undergone important changes since the 1990s resulting in increasing acceptance of non–positivistic approaches, due to a number of different developments.[1] First, in reaction to criticism of its previous strong technocratic tradition, which was said not to account adequately for questions of democracy and power relations. Second, after the frustration with the large policy reforms of the 1960s and 1970s, the self-image of policy analysis as 'problem-solving' was questioned with regard to its ability to provide the knowledge needed by policy makers, but also to encompass the complexity of policy implementation (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973). Third, policy analysis was faced with developments stemming from governance theory. The latter called attention to a change from an actor-centred to an institution-centred perspective (Schuppert, 2006). Policy was seen here as involving issues of government, management, coordination and regulation among various state and non–state stakeholders, at different sectors and levels that were immersed in non-hierarchical and network-like structures (Greany and Higham, 2018).

Faced with this high level of complexity, many policy analysts turned to interpretive approaches, which acknowledge and incorporate conceptual and theoretical discussions most often referred to as the cultural turn (Jameson, 1998), linguistic turn (Rorty, 1967), argumentative turn (Fischer and Forester, 1993) or ideational turn (Béland and Cox, 2011).

Departing from a non-positivistic understating of reality, current research focusing on lifelong learning (LLL) policies targeting young people across Europe has enquired into how these policies

are impacting young adult life courses. In this chapter, we present and discuss insights from comparative case-study research in 18 sites across Europe conducted as part of the YOUNG_ADULLLT research project. The multi-method and multi-level analysis of the case studies focused on the intersections between institutional, individual and structural aspects of the policy-making process and allowed exploration of the interactions among structural and biographical dimensions, the different stakeholders' points of view as well as consideration of the relations between the different levels of LLL policy design and implementation – from local/regional to transnational. The comparative case studies adopted a storytelling approach that aims at grasping the complex interrelations among the different actors in the field of LLL policy-making. By describing the development of policies from design to implementation as well as the effects on the intended addressees, we aim at highlighting how the meanings, values and interests of different actors interact and are socially built or modified during the concrete making of policies in their own contexts.

The chapter starts by briefly presenting and discussing the operationalisation of case-study analysis in YOUNG_ADULLLT with particular attention to the narrative strategy adopted for the case presentations. Next, the chapter discusses distinct narrative strategies to telling the story while attending to various perspectives of the policy-making process, the varying entry points as well as relational aspects. The chapter deliberates on how policy analysis as storytelling can help us advance from case to knowledge, for instance, by overcoming a one-sided perspective of policy-making to include addressees' standpoints in understanding policy-making while accounting for the complexity that characterises policy-making on the ground.

LLL policy-making: a narrative case-study research strategy

Aiming to grasp the complexity of the analysed phenomena, in the YOUNG_ADULLLT project case studies were not selected from an already 'naturally' existing range of options, rather they were culturally constructed, focusing on the dynamic interrelations of LLL policies and their contexts at a local/regional level. A multi-level and multi-method approach to case construction and analysis was adopted to examine the empirical materials collected throughout the project that derived from different research approaches and levels of data gathering, including both qualitative and quantitative data at different levels – from the transnational to the regional/local. These aimed at capturing the

diverse viewpoints of stakeholders involved in the processes of policy-making and implementation, the addressees' subjective views, macro data concerning young adults' living conditions and the main features of the educational systems and labour markets. Hence, the YOUNG_ADULLLT case studies performed the function of systematising and connecting research materials and the insights that derive from them. Successively, the manifold stock of information that built the cases was analysed, addressing the various levels at which LLL policies are negotiated and displaying the interplay among macro structures, contextual features, institutions and subjective standpoints. Further, drawing on the three main theoretical references of the project (cultural political economy [CPE], life course research and governance), each case was analysed through a constant shift of perspective. This multi-level analysis involved 'moving' from the socioeconomic dimension (e.g. different structures of the labour market and economy, social inequality and demography), to the institutional (e.g. welfare state and the education system), from the cultural dimension of varying context-dependent understandings of age, labour, family, the individual and so on, to the individual dimension, that is, the subjective perspectives of young people, their aspirations and experiences as well as transitions and trajectories in their life courses.

The aforementioned multi-level analyses were carried out by drawing on the data set built through the integration of different research methods (see Introduction to this volume). Specifically, a number of LLL policy documents and related grey literature were gathered and analysed in order to map the most relevant references of the policy frameworks in the different contexts. Furthermore, quantitative data deriving from international and national databases in addition to data produced at regional level were taken into consideration, in order to address the overall conditions of populations in the different contexts and, within these, the structural dimensions that shape the opportunities and constraints with which young adults as well as policy makers interact in the field of LLL and in the broader scope of their lives. Furthermore, qualitative information was gathered through semi-structured interviews with experts operating at different levels in the LLL domain (from policy makers to street-level professionals) and through biographical interviews of young adults participating in the analysed LLL policies. The whole set of data and information was finally integrated through the case studies' construction and further analysed using comparative case-study analysis.

For reasons of space, presenting and discussing the findings from all cases studies is not possible here; the next section presents

three examples that illustrate different narrative strategies and their contribution to analysing LLL policy-making.

Storytelling as case-study analysis: three narrative approaches

The YOUNG_ADULLLT research adopted a narrative approach in order to grasp the complex intertwinement of the different levels, dimensions and perspectives accounted for in cases' construction. The main task of storytelling as an approach to case-study analysis was thus to highlight what made each case unique and what difference it makes for LLL policy-making and to young people's life courses. A central piece of this refers to establishing *relations between sets of relationships*. Accordingly, the LLL policies selected by the project partners were seen as starting points, from which the cases themselves can be constructed and of which different stories can be told. That stories can be told differently does not mean that they are arbitrary, rather this refers to different ways of accounting for the embedding of the specific case to its context, namely the diverging policy frameworks, patterns of policy-making, networks of implementation, political discourses and macro-structural conditions at the local level. Further, telling different stories also aims at representing the 'voices' of the actors involved in the process and making the different stakeholders' and addressees' views resonate to create an intelligible narrative for each case. Analysing each case started from a selected entry point, from which a story was told. Two entry points were used that focused on: (a) the evolution of a policy in terms of main objectives, target groups, governance patterns and so on in order to highlight the intended and unintended effects of the 'current version' of the policy within its context and according to the opinions of the actors interviewed; and (b) on selected biographies that aimed to contextualise the life stories within the biographical constellations in which the young people came across the measure, the access procedures and how their life trajectories continued in and possibly after their participation in the policy measure.

The following sections present three cases that illustrate different narrative strategies proposed as examples of storytelling. It is worth noting that the selection of these narratives did not aim at comprehensiveness or exhaustiveness in terms of potentially applicable narrative strategies, rather we sought to highlight different ways of apprehending and integrating the relations among the views of different actors participating in the cases at different levels and within different structural, cultural and policy frameworks.

Back to the Future: relating policy levels

The case of Back to the Future in the Vienna functional region (FR) was narrated as a case of 'work ethics through work experience', situated between the fields of social/youth and labour market policy. Indeed, its main aim is reducing the number of youths aged 18–24 who depend on needs-oriented subsidies by improving their employability. From a multi-level perspective, it is important to stress the regional and local role of Vienna in the Austrian institutional structure, which distinguishes it from other Austrian regions. Vienna is the capital city and at the same time one of the nine federal states, such that the local job market benefits from the fact that the city offers a relatively high amount of public employment in education, health and social services. Concerning LLL policies, it is noteworthy that they are regulated according to the federal institutional framework, so that regional and local patterns of policy-making and policy implementation refer to the same institutional architecture. Moreover, the Viennese economy has gone through structural changes during the last decades, with important impacts on policy-making and target construction of Back to the Future. The leading role of Vienna in the Austrian economy is confirmed by the high gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, closer to some of the richest European regions. Approximately 86 per cent of the Viennese GDP is created in the tertiary sector, with approximately 14 per cent in the secondary sector. Accordingly, the region presents a growing number of people working in the service sector such as hospitality, but also in more knowledge-intensive fields such as finance and insurance, information and communications technology, life sciences and research and development. In addition, the region's population is increasing at a faster pace than the country's average, reaching 1.8 million inhabitants in 2014. This is mostly due to growing migration flows. Currently, 42 per cent of the population is of migrant background, while more than 20 per cent of the Viennese inhabitants are non-nationals. Moreover, since mid-2016 approximately 21,000 refugees have sought asylum in Vienna. One of the consequences is that the share of young people among the overall population is higher than the Austrian average. Thus, Back to the Future addresses some of these new challenges in the Viennese context. First, the target group (people living on basic subsidies) has changed in the last 15–20 years, and now covers different educational backgrounds, heritages and social classes. Second, the skill formation system in the Vienna region is characterised by the expansion of higher education on the one hand and by the limited relevance of the dual system of apprenticeships on

the other. Combined with the upgrading of employment demand, this creates a relatively good match in the higher sectors of skills distribution, but also a lack of opportunities for low-qualified people, except for seasonal service sector jobs. This connects with migration in-flows, creating a condition of vulnerability in the passage to the primary labour market. Accordingly, the underlying success criterion of Back to the Future is the reduction of problems concerning the labour market integration of youths who, although registered with the employment services, were unable to find a long-term job. The recent rise of young people receiving subsidies and the concurrent massive decline in apprenticeships in the area of Vienna frame these phenomena in relation to the lack of employability of the potential young workforce with special needs. The policy aims at delivering 'safeguarded' opportunities to encounter real job experiences, namely transitional (paid part-time) work placements in socioeconomic employment projects, as well as intensified coaching and training services. In terms of the solutions devised, it follows an intervention logic that focuses on labour market integration, deeming it important to give the addressees chances to experience actual job situations where they can recognise the relevance and value of their own work, improving their soft skills and raising self-esteem. The main mechanism of intervention is at the individual level, as it aims at enhancing employability levels by reshaping young people's attitudinal dispositions to learning and working through practical work experience. Back to the Future represents an example of a complex governance regime involving various public and private actors, cooperating to manage the heterogeneous needs of its target group. Concerning the impact on the young adults' life courses, Back to the Future mostly focuses on the development of positive job experiences and soft skills improvement as a way to reduce uncertainty and lead young adults to 'revise' their future planning, favouring individual activation and also targeting a re-standardisation of youths' life trajectories, while its impact on immediate employability is limited.

The narrative of this case starts by referring to the frame of reference of Back to the Future, described as the result of a local 'impulse' triggered by the municipality in charge of social assistance and public employment services in Vienna. The main factors shaping the preliminary design of the policy are thus the daily experiences of local operators in the field of social and labour policies; however, reference is also made to forerunning projects and to international experience. Indeed the 'tension' towards policy patterns applied in other contexts (particularly in Germany) – and more generally towards emerging

components of the discourses shaping the cultural understanding of LLL at the European level – represent a recurrent element of this storytelling. Then, the narrative focuses on the changing features of the local skills ecology in order to stress the increasing difficulties met by the policy target in finding adequate market integration While the capacity to absorb a growing population of low-qualified workforce is reported as one of the emerging challenges facing Viennese labour and education policies and vocational training is represented as the most frequent solution to Austrian active policies, Back to the Future is narrated as an alternative attempt to enhance the participants' human capital through working experiences, hence proposing a shift from the specialised skill-centred approach to a more holistic orientation towards soft skills.

Concerning the cultural level, there are continuities and divergences among different actors participating in the discourses animating the design and implementation of Back to the Future, with particular reference to the topics of welfare subsidies and activation programmes. Concerning the former, local media have emphasised criticism of the rationale behind subsidies distribution. While the mainstream press depicted welfare distribution as not properly controlled, the municipality explained the surge in young people drawing subsidies with reference to increased competition in the local labour market. However, this debate occurs in the context of a gradual change of paradigm in Austrian labour market policies, which realigns the activation approach, linking individual responsibility and (conditional) entitlement to social provision. By focusing on the discourse of individual responsibility, a connection between the local and the European dimension emerges, returning to the different approaches and meanings attached to skills development. The character of local policy as influenced by transnational discourses on LLL is stressed, taking into consideration the relation of such discourses with the relevance assigned to vocational training and practical experiences by Austrian LLL strategies. This entails the coexistence of two main narratives concerning the aims of LLL: while the first follows a logic overlapping labour market participation and personal development, the second is oriented towards job market needs and focuses on practical employment skills as the main way to respond to those needs (see Cefalo et al, 2018).

One peculiarity of this case includes the discursive justifications used to legitimise the intervention at individual level in the face of evident structural issues. Indeed, the task of reducing the distribution of subsidies is to be solved by operating at the individual level, drawing

on a common depiction of the target group as lacking realistic views of work and education. This stereotyping was shared among interviewed experts and seemed to pave the way for a paternalistic/pedagogical attitude towards the addressees, which threatens to further reinforce exclusion. However, these views can be contrasted with data gathered through biographical interviews with young adults, which allows a shift in focus from attitudinal problems to the lack of job opportunities for unqualified workers in the local area. Nevertheless, the growing heterogeneity of the population receiving subsidies is worth considering, framing this phenomenon in relation to the global process of labour market flexibilisation as well as education inflation and tertiarisation, which produces, at the Austrian national level as well as in many other contexts, dynamics of overqualification or, in other words, further forms of skills mismatch.

Finally, the narration of Back to the Future closes the 'narrative circularity' of its 'plot' with a reconstruction of the impact of participation in the policy on the addressees' life courses – especially with reference to young adults' attitudes towards future planning – highlighting strong resonance with previous reflections about the role of LLL as potential support for life transitions.

In summary, although in this storytelling 'plot' the main roles are played by the policy landscapes at different levels, the voices of subjects involved nevertheless find a proper space in the narrative. The main peculiarity of this case's storytelling consists in the way in which it shows how particular LLL policy objectives are reflected in implementation and experience. Indeed, in this case the primary objective is to reduce the share of social subsidy recipients, thus not an explicit skills-related objective, which implies a programme of socialisation for work through work ethics and experience rather than involving the addressees in LLL. However, although actors from different fields are involved, the dominance of an activating welfare and labour market policy approach is still evident.

NEETwork: relating policies to biographies

The case of the NEETwork project in the Milan FR was told as a case of 'targeting "weak" profiles in a "strong" context'. It was seen as a case of a 'complementary' policy integrated within the regional scheme of Youth Guarantee. NEETwork aims to compensate for the Youth Guarantee's shortcomings, such as limited engagement with the most disadvantaged groups and its weak connection with the third sector. Furthermore, given that the policy was initiated by a

private foundation, it might be considered an example of subsidiarity in the private sector in the Milanese context. Moreover, as a long-term result of governance arrangements, the network established could acquire more contextualised knowledge of the targeted group, which is traditionally disengaged from institutions. The policy aims at providing both public and private actors with a set of useful skills and insights to fill gaps shared by most of the institutions collaborating in the field of labour and training policies. It aims to engage or re-engage youths who left education prematurely, are excluded from the labour market and are not effectively reached by the Youth Guarantee scheme. Specifically, NEETwork targets a particularly disadvantaged group, that is, 18–24-year-old NEETs (neither in employment nor in education and training), with a level of education below or equal to lower secondary level, who have been unemployed for at least six months. The target group is reached through a set of complementary channels to those already used in the Youth Guarantee policies: direct calls drawing on the lists of unemployed people registered with public employment agencies, as well as lists of candidates registered with a private employment agency (which is a project partner) and through interaction on the project Facebook web page. This latter aspect is worth highlighting, since it represents an innovative strategy for target group engagement in the Italian context. The main goal of the project is to motivate participants and help them to return to education/training and transition into employment. The underlying success criteria consist of the reactivation of NEET youths and the stabilisation of their relation with local services and institutions. This resonates with the general orientation of policy-making in the Milanese context, where educational, social and labour policies are particularly invested in the activation of young people, emphasising individual choice, trying to build a quasi-market environment and leaving to the addressees the responsibility of choosing which tools to use to improve their employability. The intervention offers a four- to six-month paid traineeship at a partnering non-profit organisation. The prevalent problem perception starts from the acknowledgement of dynamism in the local labour market, where the high availability of job opportunities produces strong competition especially among young adults, with particular disadvantages for those affected by conditions of vulnerability and generally disengaged from the local network of services. Indeed, Milan is generally depicted as the main 'place for opportunities' in Italy; in comparison to the majority of other Italian cities and regions, it offers more highly qualified job opportunities, has more medium-size and large enterprises and is

more innovative in its social policies. According to Eurostat data, Milan is the richest metropolitan area in Italy, with a GDP at current market prices of €186.045 million in 2013, about 10 per cent of the national GDP and third in the European Union (EU) after Paris and London. The GDP per capita, €44,700 is about 36 per cent higher than the national average. The value added per capita (2015) is €44,839 in Milan FR, while in Lombardy it is €32,001 and only €24,288 at the national level. Moreover, in 2015 Milan was ranked tenth in Europe for economic prospects (according to the European Regional Economic Growth Index). Furthermore, concerning the labour market, the Eurostat data confirm better performance than the Italian average: in 2016, the unemployment rate in Italy was 11.7 per cent while across the EU it was 10 per cent and in Milan FR it was 7.5 per cent. The unemployment rate in the second quarter of 2016 was 6.9 per cent compared to 7.8 per cent in the previous quarter. Overall, there were 322,000 unemployed people. The unemployment rate among young adults is 28.2 per cent in Italy, while in this region it is 10 percentage points lower (18.2 per cent). At the same time, NEET (18–29) rates in the Lombardy region show an increase from 12.9 per cent in 2004 to 22.1 per cent in 2015, with a decrease of 2 percentage points in 2016 (20.1 per cent). In absolute terms, NEETs have increased from 160,000 in 2004 to 229,000 in 2016, producing a discouraging effect for low-qualified young adults in a dynamic region. The solution proposed by NEETwork focuses on 'protected' work experiences in third sector organisations, which are deemed to be a proper environment for a 'soft' approach to work and basic/soft skills acquisition. The prevalent LLL logic is thus a mix between preventive and interventive. The main mechanism of intervention focuses on the individual dimension, although a change in the local institutional system is also fostered, given the almost unprecedented involvement of third sector organisations in the local traineeship system and, more broadly, the shared task of constructing 'new' knowledge and a deeper understanding of the NEET phenomenon. In terms of governance patterns, the case is an example of subsidiarity by a private foundation coordinating the network in order to overcome the limited effectiveness of a public programme (Youth Guarantee) in engaging a particularly disadvantaged group. The impact on the addressees' life courses is mainly focused on reactivation, resonating with the mainstream discourses of individual responsibility in reaching a higher level of competitiveness, while the aim of compensating the qualification deficit through re-engagement with institutions reveals the underlying task of re-standardisation.

The NEETwork case was narrated using two addressees' life trajectories, which were chosen in order to explore the 'black box' of the NEET condition. Indeed, in the Italian mainstream discourse this condition is very often represented through a one-dimensional representation, and most of the interviewed experts seemed to converge upon this point. Italian young NEETs are often depicted as unskilled, unreliable, 'lazily' inactive and basically unfit for employment and, more generally, for 'proper' adult roles. To question this widespread stereotyping, which largely neglects the effects of structural inequalities, the selected life stories of participants in the NEETwork policy show two particularly contrasting cases both in terms of biographical construction and subjective coping with the NEET condition. The biographies selected are Conchita (pseudonym), a very active and resourceful migrant young woman who left secondary school before graduating due to the birth of her son, and Fabio (pseudonym) whose views and attitudes were close to the hegemonic representation of NEETs before participating in the project, especially in terms of lack of orientation and limited future planning capabilities. Focusing on Conchita's learning biography, the coincidence between structural reform and an unpredicted life event is shown, taking into consideration how it affected the plans of a young woman who was forced to revise her choices and who was now looking for new solutions in the LLL field to fill the gap caused by her lack of qualifications. In fact, pursuing future employment in the administrative domain she enrolled in a professional higher secondary school, which at the time of her registration provided a qualification after three years. Yet, in the meantime, the national reform of secondary schooling based on the lyceum model postponed the threshold for qualification to five years, and her pregnancy prevented her from completing education. Here, a connection becomes visible between the specificity of a single biography to the broader structural and cultural phenomena, which builds an 'intersection' of different disadvantages in the Italian context. The latter includes a trend of educational segregation of migrant youths in professional schools, which is further enhanced by the recent lyceum-based reforms, the scarce availability of public services supporting family conciliation and the difficulties faced by migrants and particularly migrant women in labour market integration. Going back to Conchita's trajectory, the description of the tactics she applied in order to overcome the vulnerable condition she found herself in introduces the analysis of some relevant features of the national and local context, which shaped the opportunities she met. Indeed, regardless of her actual specialised skills as an administrative

technician, as an early school leaver she acknowledged her low chances of competing in the regular market. Thus, she addressed the irregular market and sought for a balance between low-skilled jobs (mostly in the context of care) and medium–high specialised activities in the administrative field (e.g. filling tax return forms or carrying out family reunification practices). In managing these activities, Conchita relies on a local community of compatriots, which constitutes both the target market for her administrative advisory activities and the network through which she finds and exchanges jobs as a caregiver. Moreover, it is the same community (here understood as an 'extended family') that supports her in conciliating family and work, providing informal babysitting services since her separation from her partner when their son was very young. Again, through this biographical account we acknowledge the family-centred welfare model characteristic of the Italian context as well as the strong ethnicisation, segregation and occupational specialisation of the (regular and irregular) labour markets, which is a widespread phenomenon in the national market. This is particularly prevalent in the Milanese local context due to the high competitiveness of its dynamic labour markets. Starting from the acknowledgement of her 'peripheral' positioning in the local market, the young woman tackles the urgent need for an income by proactively exploiting all the opportunities she is able to reach, regardless of their character of irregularity. At the same time, Conchita elaborates a plan according to which the LLL measures potentially represent a means for overcoming her low competitiveness, aiming for future compensation for her qualification deficit. The first solution she found was thus the enrichment of her curriculum with certifiable experiences in regular jobs, and she mostly interpreted the Youth Guarantee during and after the NEETwork project as a chance for emancipation from the trapping dynamics of the irregular labour market. This demonstrates that the strong emphasis placed on NEETs' needs for soft and specific skills acquisition and (re)activation by Italian policy makers does not necessarily fit all cases, and even a policy targeting low-profile groups such as the NEETwork project is subjectively reinterpreted using an instrumental perspective. By highlighting this divergence between subjective expectations and the prevalent discourses about NEETs, the second biography further shows different levels of (re)production of discourses about NEETs' assumed needs. It starts with Fabio's views: he expresses the internalisation of stigma attached to people who were not able to unfold linear, and thus 'proper', transitions. The neoliberal ideology of blaming the individual for biographical 'failures' (in his case, leaving school early) resonates in the young man's view, leading

him to represent his current lack of aspirations and orientation both as the cause and effect of his inadequacy and inactivity. At the same time, the reference to Fabio's learning biography introduces the issue of widespread distrust in the effectiveness of the school system among Italian youths, mostly due to its traditional top-down and theory-based approach, which is considered too far from 'real' work life. It is noteworthy that this judgement has often also been confirmed by interviewed experts and, more generally, it connects with the main directions of more recent reforms of the educational system, which are meant to fill the gaps in the educational system in terms of orientation towards more pragmatic and skill-based knowledge. Still, with these reforms a 'new' structural contradiction is produced, since the educational reforms are still ongoing and an established system for skill certification is still not set up at the national level. This leads to the coexistence of the crucial role of formal qualifications with a distrust in the only institutions that can provide them, embedded in a context where the lack of alternative solutions for improving market integration harms, above all, the most vulnerable profiles, as shown by Fabio's story. In fact, although the traineeship experience is narrated very positively both by Fabio and his tutor within the hosting organisation, despite his reliability concerning duties and schedules and the good attitude he has demonstrated, he is still requested to give further proof of his adequacy in order to be 'emancipated' from his NEET condition. Indeed, staff at the hosting organisation have acknowledged and given value to Fabio's contribution to daily work routines, asking him to prolong their professional relationship. But instead of proposing a standard contract, the organisation has offered a second traineeship. Here the cultural representations underlying the more obvious economic reasons for the organisation's choice clearly emerge. Indeed, the stereotypical rhetoric resonates in this dynamic, reproducing assumptions concerning the unreliability of youths and their necessity to learn how to overcome obstacles, which is often depicted as one of their main 'generational shortcomings', caused by alleged excessive protection given by their families – largely acknowledged as the paramount form of Italian welfare, while at the same time parents are blamed for the excessive pampering of their children, preventing them from becoming 'real' adults, even when economic conditions are not adequate to support inactive children for prolonged periods. In spite of Fabio's positive performance, he still seems to be required to give evidence of his 'adequacy' for an adult professional role. His story captures an intersection of structural and cultural weaknesses which contributes to 'freezing' him in a vulnerable

condition. Indeed, the widespread use of traineeships among Italian labour policy measures is integrated, addressing the rhetoric that views experience in actual work situations as the main gateway to more stable employment for the young unexperienced workforce, regardless of structural problems of labour market integration. In addition, a critical reflection about the traineeship (and similar) tool seems to be needed, especially when it targets people in vulnerable conditions who might acquire a new consciousness about their capabilities. Nonetheless, suffering from the lack of subsequent chances to stay in the market triggers a 'side-effect' of further frustration and potential exclusion, which is enhanced in a context where the absence of a system for skill certification at the national level prevents young people from finding these experiences useful in terms of enhancing individual skill profiles.

In summary, the Italian case narrative was selected mainly because of its strong focus on the intersection between a policy and two different addressees' biographies, which are presented in order to highlight the contrast between different potential subjective approaches and meaning constructions in relation to a policy with limited leeway for personalisation in its implementation pattern. Indeed, the biographies show how different individual profiles belonging to a (supposedly) homogenous target group may 'adapt' the policy to their needs, which are to some extent different, yet still include common contextual issues (namely the strong emphasis on formal qualification in the Italian context and the very competitive labour market in their FR context). Starting from the 'intersection' of the biographies with the policy (namely considering the most relevant interactions with the experts they met during their paths within the policy), this narrative is also able to refer to broader discourses and underlying assumptions in the local and national LLL domain.

Ohjaamo Centre: relating biographies to contexts

The case of the Ohjaamo Centre in the south-west Finland FR was constructed as a case of 'holistic support to develop employability'. Although in terms of sector orientation it is considered mostly as a youth policy, it is important to highlight that in the Finnish context youth and social policies are deeply intertwined with both education and labour market policies. Consequently, its narrative presents the case of a guidance centre integrated within the regional scheme of Youth Guarantee, particularly stressing the diverse nature of the services it provides. Although the Centre has a broad target group (youths under 30 living in the region) and a low-threshold access,

special emphasis is placed on young adults who have problems related to their educational or occupational pathways as well as those living in otherwise challenging situations. Its activities unfold in the south–west Finland FR, the second largest economic area in Finland with strong links to the Stockholm business area. The main industries of the region include the naval industry and metal construction. However, over the past few decades, these traditional industries have been complemented by the growing service sector. Moreover, south–west Finland is a strong educational region with 75 post-compulsory educational institutions, two universities and four universities of applied sciences. The Centre gathers under one roof and rationalises a number of services, particularly focusing on youth unemployment and promoting participation in education. The forms of support provided include personal advice and guidance, support in life management, career planning, social skills, as well as education and employment support. Then, as a multi-service centre, it also aims to facilitate participants' overall well-being and life management skills, which are here mainly interpreted as 'prerequisites' for becoming employable and/or participating in education. Furthermore, as a more general goal, the programme aims to strengthen and simplify services for young people and eliminate the duplication of activities. The prevalent problem perception focuses on the potential inadequacy of youths as future employees, and the main solution proposed focuses on the support of their transition to the labour market. When it comes to the different logics of LLL policies, due to its very broad target group and wide scope of available services, four types of logic can be distinguished in the operations of the Centre (prevention, compensation, activation, empowerment). The main mechanism of intervention is focused on the empowerment of individual educational and professional profiles through individualised support. The governance pattern of the case is based on large networks integrating different services and experts, with significant leeway for adaptation and interpretation of the national policy (mostly focused on the holistic approach), which in this case is particularly geared towards employability. Concerning the impact on young adults' life courses, the policy is clearly based on assumptions of the prevalence of standardised normal life courses: enrolling into education or entering the labour market are seen as the ultimate goals for the participating young adults.

The Ohjaamo Centre case narrative was introduced by contextualising it in relation to the local landscape of LLL policies, showing how the patterns of policy planning and implementation are coordinated between the Finnish national and regional authorities. As

a cross-administrative and cross-level programme, the evolution of the Finnish Youth Guarantee scheme is then shown, due to its relevance at the international and national level and, moreover, its function as an 'umbrella policy scheme' which interacts with the Ohjaamo Centre policy. Indeed, in its turn the Centre is presented as a cross-administrative policy designed for local adaptation aimed at taking regional conditions into account, both in terms of socio-demographic context and the local opportunity structures that interact with young adults. Concerning this latter point, the main challenges for the area are highlighted in terms of their relevance in shaping the opportunities actually available to young adults. Specifically, the shortage of skilled workers in the growing industrial fields (e.g. ship-building industry) is reported as a factor of skills mismatch, which seems hard to tackle in spite of institutional efforts to integrate unemployed youths in this field, and in the face of a general good availability of measures devoted to supporting education-to-work transitions. Indeed, many young people's occupational aspirations and goals seem not to fit those fields where there is a shortage of workers. Furthermore, the reference to Youth Guarantee allows us to introduce a reflection about the prevalent conception of youth issues at a cultural level in the Finnish context, which is particularly relevant in the case of a policy oriented towards the holistic approach, such as the Ohjaamo Centre. Indeed, the symbolic status reached by the Youth Guarantee in Finnish public discourses is stressed, as are its ambivalent effects. In fact, the Youth Guarantee has contributed to highlighting the precarious conditions of a relevant proportion of Finnish young adults, yet by its 'dominant' position within the Finnish public discourses on youth, the programme seems to have clouded other significant youth issues, such as basic youth services, disregarding their multidimensional understanding (see Tikkanen et al, 2018).

Considering the strong emphasis placed on employability by the Youth Guarantee discourse, the issue of balance between the focus on youths' personal empowerment and more narrow interventions in labour/skill-related dimensions emerges for a low-threshold and multi-functional service like the Ohjaamo Centre. Furthermore, the importance of the rationalisation of the local skills ecology is also reinforced by the regional youth strategy agenda, which tends to relate youth participation to labour-related issues. Therefore, as it is positioned at the 'crossroads' of these cultural tensions, and in order to be able to respond to the manifold needs of such a broad potential target group, the Centre necessarily requires high levels of flexibility in providing its services. In order to represent this heterogeneity and

at the same time preserve the maximum anonymity of the interviewed young adults, two different 'ideal-typical biographies' are introduced. Both of the stories were narratively constructed by incorporating experiences, trajectories and visions deriving from the biographical interviews carried out. In this way, two contrasting profiles of users were used to examine the actual capacity of the Centre to adapt to the addressees' expectations while maintaining a strong relation with the context. Moreover, the social, cultural and structural 'distance' between the two profiles resonates with the increasing segregation of young people in the FR: those who are 'succeeding' in their trajectories and those who are clearly in disadvantaged life positions. The stories of Harri and Niko contrast with each other in terms of educational trajectories and relation to the labour market. On the one hand, Harri is presented as a young man in his mid-twenties, who graduated from a university of applied sciences and at the time of the interview was looking for a job after a short period of unemployment. Harri contacted the Ohjaamo Centre in order to get help with finding employment. On the other hand, Niko was introduced as a youth in his early twenties who has completed compulsory education but has no other educational qualifications. Niko's life story was quite fragmented and his motivation for participating in the Ohjaamo Centre's activities is related, as he sees it, to his need to 'get his life together' by maintaining a reasonable daily rhythm, having something meaningful to do and getting support in planning his future steps (see Tikkanen et al, 2018).

The unfolding of Harri's life trajectory is narrated by mostly referring to his capacity to plan and set medium- and long-term goals (e.g. studying engineering at university), which gives a general meaning and orientation to his choices. Moreover, his story is constructed in order to highlight the importance of maintaining a certain degree of reversibility even for the most relevant life choices, which, as in Harri's case, might need to be revised due to a number of potential contextual factors and, more generally, due to the increasing unpredictability of labour markets. Given his attitude and capacity for 'biographical self-management', Harri's expectations towards the Centre are mostly concerned with its function as a guidance and counselling service, which he uses to further enhance his ability of skills self-assessment, also taking the opportunity to extend the range of channels for his job-seeking activities. Very evocatively, his story ends with Harri declining his counsellor's offer for more in-depth guidance services, because of his exclusive interest in strictly employability-related activities. Here, it becomes clear that a narrow focus on employability might also be

expected by some users, especially by those who rely on a consistent set of resources to be applied when pursuing their professional goals.

The story of Niko is instead strongly characterised by continuous 'interruptions' and recurrent 'failures', as they are represented in reference to his difficult learning biography. Niko's problems in education are then narrated as combined with alcohol addiction and other typical effects of the structural disadvantages he 'inherits' from his background. Consequently, the unqualified and very poorly oriented Niko primarily finds in the Centre support for his (initially very limited) capacity to recognise his aspirations, assess his opportunities and skills and plan accordingly. Here the issue of personal empowerment through a holistic approach thus becomes apparent as a different task for the Centre. In order to maximise the contrast with Harri's profile, his very access to the Centre is narrated differently in the case of Niko. Indeed, while the first actively chooses to use the service following friends' advice, the latter gets in touch with the Centre by the intermediation of an outreach youth worker who directs him towards a rehabilitative workshop. At least initially, Niko's profile is thus represented as particularly far from the proactive neoliberal subject able to self-determine their biography by relying on personal and social resources. And his story concludes with reference to his will to (re)engage with the educational system and acquire a qualification, which is, however, hampered by his doubts about his capacity to 'keep the pace' of and properly respond to expectations and duties related to education and work situations. Finally, summarising the main features of the ideal-typical biographies, the contrast in terms of different addressees' needs is brought to the fore. The cases of Harri and Niko are understood as opposite ends of the 'addressee continuum' of the Ohjaamo Centre. Harri is depicted as a goal-oriented young man with a reliable support network of family and friends, and with good study and job-seeking skills. Consequently, he is represented as a young adult able to acknowledge his own skills and to apply high functional abilities in general, who accesses the services only as an extra support to his job-seeking activities. On the other hand, Niko is represented as being in a much more vulnerable situation, which results in his need for multidimensional, in-depth services. The meaning attached by the two young adults to the same policy is very different, since Niko attributes to it a far more comprehensive meaning than Harri, for whom the policy is much more of an instrumental tool for his own professional project.

In summary, the storytelling applied in the Finnish case is a valuable narrative strategy, since it relies on the construction of two ideal-typical

biographies, which preserve the anonymity of the interviewed youths and further polarise the distinction between potential profiles within a very heterogeneous target group. The (re)construction of ideal-typical biographies by drawing on biographical materials actually gathered throughout the research, allows us to further show different 'patterns of needs' and subjective expectations from the policy, stressing the contrast between the need for very focused and instrumental support in the process of labour market integration and the need for a more holistic and guidance-oriented approach due to vulnerable conditions.

Conclusion: from case to knowledge – storytelling as policy analysis

The use of storytelling as a tool for policy analysis aims to overcome a rather common constraint in the extant literature. Indeed, in this domain there is a quite widespread use of narratives focused on the policy problem, which tend to reproduce the perspective and the conceptual frames of policy makers, or, more generally, of the people who design or implement policies, leaving little or no room for addressees' viewpoints (see Polletta et al, 2011). This tendency particularly emerges in situations in which different kinds of narratives are produced by different actors in a potentially conflicting scenario, with different interest groups (e.g. McBeth et al, 2005). At the same time, it is noteworthy that storytelling has been widely considered as a fruitful tool for policy design and planning (van Hulst, 2012), but also as a way, in the health care sector, to deliver care in unbalanced relationship situations (Banks-Wallace, 1999).

In YOUNG_ADULLLT, a narrative approach has been used to analyse the case studies constructed during the research, in order to take into account the points of view of the three main actors of the policies, analysing them according to the three theoretical references of the project research.

This interpretive approach has proved useful in reading the same case from diverse points of view, since this allows critical analysis of the correspondences or divergences between the underlying assumptions in policy-making – the 'official' CPE – and those which affect and shape implementation, capable of deeply modifying the 'official' aims and purposes of the policy – including for reasons other than adaptation to the context – as already highlighted by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973). In addition, storytelling is also a main tool for giving room to addresses' voices before and after the crossroads between their trajectories and the policies (and vice versa, because

policies are also changed by the addressees' reactions, but designers and policy makers are often not necessarily aware of this). Thus, the approach to the case studies chosen allows each of the main actors to 'tell their story', and the narrative strategy applied in order to put the different perspectives into relation provided two main 'entry points' for case storytelling: the evolution of the policy in context and the life stories of addressees. In this way, for instance, the addressees' paths within the policy were observed from the decision-makers' standpoint, or that of the street-level professionals. At the same time, the more 'biographical' entry point allows exploration of the relations among the individual trajectories, the policies and their context, yielding insights into the subjective negotiations of goals and meanings of LLL policies.

Storytelling allowed contextualisation of the match between addressees and implementers, considering each of them as a 'hub' of social, parental, small group, organisational and institutional relations that shape this match of two different worlds and are also shaped by the match itself. Fabio's situation, for example, shows the case of a clash of different presuppositions: he changes his attitudes towards work, but, while the implementer's view is open to his 're-standardisation' as a result of his learning path through the measure, the firms that participate in the project assume he needs only an internship, in other words, assume that the paradigm of activation must always operate and are not able to accept (and to detect) that the behaviour of the NEET can be changed thanks to the effectiveness of the first internship. In the Finnish case, we can see that the importance of the Youth Guarantee scheme, which reproduces the successful policy of this country at the European level, shows that the mix between activation paradigm and employability goals may sound positive, but is not so successful as part of a holistic approach needed to meet 'multi-problematic' young adults. Finally, also in the Austrian case the 'dual-system implicit model' embedded in the policy analysed in the case study seems to consider skills as the functional equivalent of a study certificate and so the real aim towards addressees is to push them to fill the gap between pre-existing and needed skills, regardless of the young adults' needs and expectations; after all, already thinking about needs and gaps rather than about expectations is emblematic of a 'qualification-driven' approach.

In trying to establish 'relations between sets of relationships', storytelling allowed us to find meaningful sets of relations without a dramatic simplification of the reality, a price often paid by comparativists when making comparisons between overly abstract versions of reality. In other words, a serious limit of comparison is

the strong simplification of cases needed to allow comparison itself, because generalisation is permitted only at such a high level of abstraction as to render the generalisation useless. On the contrary, by highlighting relations between sets of relationships the storytelling approach shows, particularly along the biographical entry point, that the relationships among the designers', implementers' and addressees' points of view are sometimes divergent, especially when the activation paradigm seems to promote the so-called 'Matthew effect' (Merton, 1968), according to which only the less disadvantaged part of a target group can be supported. The approach also shows how sometimes, in a Paretian situation,[2] the 'right' choice is made by the addressees for the 'wrong' reason, obtaining the intended results according to a diverse mechanism. This happens because young adults react in diverse ways to policies, striking a strong similarity with the situation described by Merton in 1968, when he noted that Americans believed in social goals such as success and material wealth, but the absence of equal access to those goals generated a strain between the socially encouraged goals of society and the socially acceptable means to achieve them.

In the case of young adults, to paraphrase Beck (1992), the impossibility of tackling systemic contradictions (mismatch between job supply and demand) with biographical solutions (e.g. vocational training, guidance), leads to different kinds of adaptation to this contradiction. In particular, we think that the most widespread adaptation strategy could be *conformist* for people who work hard and try to succeed despite their difficulties, or *ritualist*, that is, accepting the means but not the goals (following the available policies without the belief that they can really be useful), or indeed refusing both means and goals, the *retreatist*, social dropout in Merton's scheme, prone to drug use or crime. On the other hand, *rebellion*, according to which some people might want to replace the means and goals with new ones, could be assimilated into the situation in which people look for ways other than standard employment (compatibility with the de-standardisation of life courses). According to this scheme, both ritualists and conformists accept the means, and this is the only thing that we can see from the point of view of the policies, but storytelling can explain the reasons why a conformist could more successfully fulfil the goals of the same policy than a retreatist. Understanding the diverse ways in which two addressees participate in the same policy with opposite results is crucial to investigating the 'success' of the policy. Hirschman's scheme (1970) can also help us to understand young adult conditions: while loyalty can be assimilated into Merton's conformism, between exit and voice a trade-off in terms of uncertainty (exit) versus

tolerance to unsuitable conditions (voice) exists; in our analysis we have evidence of a low level of attention to young adults' voices, which leads young people to drop out of the measures or not even considering participating in them. A better understanding of these phenomena is crucial to designing more effective and better focused policies for the different users.

Notes

1   Although this chapter is the result of the collaboration of the three authors, Marcelo Parreira do Amaral has written the first two sections; Sebastiano Benasso has written the third, fourth, fifth and sixth section and Mauro Palumbo has written the seventh section.

2   We can recall that, according to Pareto's view (1916), people usually act in a 'non-logic' way, and sometimes this behaviour leads to the result that the designer hypothesised, albeit following a different causal path.

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Navigating lifelong learning policies in Europe: impacting and supporting young adults' life courses

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Introduction

The navigation metaphor introduced in the beginning of this book already offers us useful imagery with which to structure our ideas on lifelong learning (LLL) policies and the experiences of young adults across the European Union (EU). We feel that all figures involved in this story – young people, case workers, street-level professionals, managers, consultants, policy makers, researchers, teachers, journalists and so on (artists, activists) – are ultimately learning to be navigators across the seas of human biographies. In the same way as sailors must know about winds and streams, rocks, waves and icebergs to travel and reach their havens safely, young adults, experts and policy makers face similar challenges.

Upon reflection, young people constitute such a diverse group that the reference to sailing may even be too narrow. Some youth sail these seas, while others ski, swim, surf, snorkel or dive in them. Still others ride jet skis or pedalo boats. Despite the inevitable simplification, if we assume that they are the sailors of the metaphor, the point is that young people navigate old psychological scars, overwhelming academic drawbacks and anguishing life course transitions. On the other hand, experts find their way through imprecise policy diagnoses, overwhelming social needs, performance indicators, one-dimensional official benchmarks, slippery research problems and unexpressed human needs. Although this book does not wish provide an ultimately reliable compass, we expect that the previous chapters at least contributed to charting the *mare incognito* where all these actors come together to play their roles.

These uncharted waters no longer have the shape our traditional wisdom had assumed. While our representation of youth associated

learning with education and schools, nowadays this premise is very rapidly becoming obsolete. In the industrial era, schools established some channels towards employment by designing a narrow array of vocational specialities. Many students undertook those specialities in order to learn the trade that would provide their living for their whole career. Nowadays, two important trends have questioned this conjecture.

On the one hand, at present education and the labour market are not delimited by clear-cut boundaries. Overlaps between the two realms expand as each one adopts the practices of the other. Thus, secondary schools deliver career guidance, vocational and higher education students do internships to gain work experience, and educators are compelled to take employment outlooks into account when designing new programmes. Similarly, the operation of labour markets increasingly entails educational practices such as skills development, learning on the job, knowledge management and fostering innovation.

On the other hand, today schools are not the only formal setting for learning. Qualification frameworks openly recognise that workers not only complete tasks on the job but may also acquire new skills. The whole array of corporations, public bureaucracies and non-profit organisations increasingly adopt concepts that take training and learning for granted, such as human resources, innovation or quality management. Briefly, it is neither plausible to maintain that learning is substantively distinct in formal and non-formal settings nor that navigation between formal, non-formal and informal learning is a continuous journey rather than separate trips between demarcated ports.

Hence, drawing a route map is a difficult task for most stakeholders of LLL. Young people experience the complexity of youth as a personal problem, but their perception usually captures only a small part of the bigger picture. Ahead of them, professionals and decision makers struggle with the complexities of policy design and implementation, similarly unable to comprehend the whirlpools created by the overlay and interaction of different social milieus (Mills, 1959). Young participants and experts inhabit social fields where previously distinct policy areas intermingle and previously clear distinctions according to formality become blurred. The following sections attempt to spell out some clues for understanding these social fields through the conceptual lenses adopted in this research.

This book draws on quantitative and qualitative data collected in 18 functional regions (FRs) located in nine member states of the EU. An international team of researchers have analysed this evidence, taking

into account several levels of governance. Thus, some pieces of EU legislation pattern LLL policies in a similar fashion, but member states embed this template in their own legislation and policies. The analyses took a step further by contextualising 18 regional settings in this wider picture. At the regional level, street-level professionals deliver policies to cater to the needs of target groups. Since a particular view of these needs is already in-built in the policies, and the beneficiaries are enmeshed in complex struggles, the analyses unveil a nuanced, diverse array of outcomes.

The following sections pattern the conclusions drawing on three theoretical perspectives that guided our analysis. Each of them highlights a few important points that are helpful to make sense of the evidence posited by the thematic chapters. Thus, cultural political economy (CPE) provides crucial insights on the intimate connections between complexity reduction and the institutional normalisation of life courses. Life course research (LCR) sheds light on the equally relevant connections between young adults' biographies and active learning. Finally, governance theories account for the regional dimension of LLL policies.

Coping with complexity and trying to normalise life courses

Since the oil crisis that shook the world economy in the 1970s, sea-changing social transformations have certainly created new and heterogeneous realities that have triggered unprecedented debates on collective affairs. When such tools as managing internal demand (Keynesianism), building large-scale factories (Fordism) and expanding rates of enrolment in schools seemed to deliver solutions, it made sense to expect that minor adjustments of the tools would eventually tackle most social problems. Thus, people were considered young until they finished their education and settled in the labour market. Mainstream political ideas relied on a few measures such as raising prices, wages and school leaving ages, in order to respond to disruptions.

In contrast, when the toolkit failed to perform as expected, a huge variety of alternatives entered the policy agenda. Thus, when prices, wages and leaving ages became obsolete as policy instruments, the agenda turned to exchange rates, innovative financial assets, privatisation, flexible labour markets, active labour and welfare policies. Simultaneously, the agenda of education policy was flooded with learning outcomes, school quality, school autonomy, school performance-based management, emphasis on science, technology,

engineering and mathematics, new vocationalism, leadership skills, school choice, public–private partnerships, social entrepreneurship and LLL. In addition, youth was no longer a short experience – 'a sip of happiness' in the words of Khadzijski (1974) – but became a blurred and unknown terrain of troubles and strivings that required specialised work. Many governments institutionalised youth policy as a cross–cutting area.

Although the trends of national statistics recorded these novel social conditions, in the end it was the teachers, school principals, social workers and mayors who had to respond to the anxieties of people who were striving to muddle through this world. Remarkably, in order to grasp how young adults and experts navigate LLL, it is indispensable to recognise that the social transformations that we normally associate with post–industrial societies and globalisation brought about extremely complex policy agendas.

Since the late 1970s, both youth and experts in education, labour market and social policies have attempted to reduce such complexity. While the former were increasingly unsure of their parents' advice for navigating changing circumstances that did not fit with the mould of the old standards, the latter were increasingly insecure in choosing the best instruments, and even more so, crafting coherent mixes of instruments. However, the adoption of certain causal beliefs (or causal narratives, or theories of change) has equipped all actors with operational criteria to cope with this reality. By advancing an explanation of what is going on, these causal beliefs reduce complexity to a point where all parties can at least figure out what they are able to do.

The dominant economistic understanding of LLL seems to have reduced complexity in this way. From such a perspective, settling in employment is the crucial step in life transitions, and jobs provide many opportunities to learn. If policies open these opportunities and make the most out of them, LLL can kill two birds with one stone. These policies can underpin academic performance (or compensate for previous shortcomings) as well as improve employment rates.

A wide spectrum of evidence indicates the prevalence of this perspective. The interpretive policy analyses conducted as part of YOUNG_ADULLLT showed that the vast majority of policies examined draw on this approach (see Parreira do Amaral and Zelinka, 2019). Chapter 3 explored how employment-centred LLL is complementary with social investment in Austria and Finland. Chapter 4 found encompassing theories of change that are based on these tenets in Austria, Finland, Germany and Scotland. Chapter 6

mapped out the synergies and the dysfunctions of skills development in the 18 FRs studied in the book.

However, complexity reduction is not a neutral and innocent social practice but an intricate outcome of power relations. The ongoing policies are not the solution to an abstract problem but the ultimate effect of decisions that sometime policy makers were able to legitimise. These decisions require that youth comply with certain requirements and that street-level professionals adapt their views to an official template.

On the one hand, if employment is the milestone, any life course must lead towards integration into the labour market. Regardless of the many dimensions of vulnerability, young people have to be workers by their mid-twenties. Otherwise, as the argument continues, they risk suffering from further social problems that aggravate their situations of vulnerability. As shown in Chapter 4, where apprenticeships, on-the-job learning and labour market intelligence are consolidated, LLL programmes may cater to some groups of youth who are not in the mainstream pathway. Nevertheless, some expert interviewees made some negative if not actually derogatory comments about the beneficiaries of the programmes in Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Furthermore, as Chapter 6 reported, in a country such as Finland with a universalistic welfare regime, researchers have detected powerful effects that place the pressure of normalisation on the shoulders of youth. Chapter 7 questioned the ability of LLL policies to diminish vulnerability in young people's life conditions by defining employability as the all-encompassing aim of the policy design and neglecting the need to provide access to basic health, income and social services. An eventual consequence of complexity reduction seems to be that youths are expected to follow more standardised life courses. The danger is that the anomalies are read as deviation instead of manifestations of incongruent or overly simplistic policy approaches.

On the other hand, street-level professionals are becoming aware of these contradictions. Since LLL policies impact on people's lives, professionals are engaged in very meaningful social interactions. They may be defensive or even nasty at times, but most professionals are aware of the circumstances of their interlocutors. Thus, in Italy and Spain, the expert interviewees' narratives, analysed in Chapter 4, claim that they do not feel comfortable with the official approach. They portray more nuanced descriptions of young people's circumstances, which notoriously illustrate why their work cannot be so effective as expected. In a similar vein, Chapter 11 maps out some configurations of actors, institutions and pedagogies that eventually fashion spaces

for learning in such different regions as Milan, south–west Finland and Vienna.

Diverse life courses and active learning

Young adults themselves also feel the need to adjust their life plans to the changing living conditions in their countries and regions. Many envision their future as achieving a 'normal' state of adulthood with a secure job, a family and an independent home. However, they feel the pressure of having to cope with various risks and insecurities, which prompt them to delay making critical life choices and shift planning horizons to the nearest future. As the analysis in Chapter 10 revealed, young people respond with less defined life projects, replacing them with a readiness to keep their options open – a flexibility of living in an 'extended present' (Nowotny, 1994; Leccardi, 2008; Feixa et al, 2015). But does this allegorise a passive floating on the waves of social change or do young adults actively strive to navigate their life courses to the desired dream shores?

Reconstructing the learning biographies from the narratives of the young interviewees, we encountered a wide diversity of individual life paths, which diverted significantly from the normative sequence of transitions prescribed in the policies. A pattern that could be discerned in most FRs was to take a detour back to education after experiencing a break with formal schooling. Young people following this strategy looked for LLL programmes that would allow them to achieve the educational degree they considered essential for accessing their local labour markets. This was more common for young people from families with limited financial and cultural resources, especially among those of migrant origin without recognised educational credentials and informal skills. In contrast, young adults with more privileged backgrounds took a wait-and-see attitude towards LLL and signed up for various courses expecting the local economy to improve and provide more opportunities for young employees. For them, the period of involvement in further learning was a legitimate form of waithood while being financially and emotionally supported by their parents. Superficially similar to this but led by strong ethical considerations was the strategy of young adults who participated in forms of civic learning. Having had a better experience with formal schooling but still unable to access the labour market, the leading motivation of this group was to gain more (particularly soft) skills while helping those in need. A fourth pattern of learning biographies was exemplified by young adults who found in LLL a fertile space to develop their personality,

overcome personal barriers and discover their 'learning' self. The informal individualised support they received in the programmes enabled them to develop life projects and mobilise resources to achieve these. There was also another distinctive learning path of young adults who are struggling to overcome severe psychological and physical difficulties. Being in very vulnerable situations with limited or no family support, these young adults became involved in LLL to regain self-esteem and reclaim autonomy.

Several chapters in this book argue that to a different extent and in various forms young adults in varying regions in Europe are willing to take on the challenge of further study and training in order to successfully integrate into the labour market. However, they look at their involvement in LLL not only as a way to raise their 'employability', but also as a way to develop skills and abilities to actively manage their life courses and achieve a balance between the life domains. It is clear from the analysis that young people's voices are not heard and their participation as active learners in the policies is not planned or desired. Often youth felt that policy makers and practitioners intended to limit their participation to the 'choice' to sign up for courses and considered them to be too incompetent to influence the process of learning in accordance with their life plans. Most programmes were not flexible enough and did not allow young people's influence in their design and implementation – which resulted in demotivation and dropping out. The competencies young people acquired informally through various activities oftentimes were not sufficiently appreciated by the practitioners and were not used in the learning process. Studies on the EU Structured Dialogue (Banjac, 2017) have found that this mechanism creates the necessary space for consultation between young people and policy makers, encouraging youth to act as 'active citizens capable, as both individuals and communities, of managing their own risk' (471). In our research, however, the biographical narratives of the interviewees attest to the fact that the new modes of governance have not reached all groups of youth at risk, at least in the domain of LLL. LLL policies in present-day Europe have not yet found a form of learning that meets the diverse needs of the current young generation and that contributes to developing the participant as a competent and autonomous learner.

Labour market activation that presupposes deficiencies on the part of young adults and places the blame on their supposed 'apathy' will not have the desired effect unless situated in the broader perspective of social inclusion policies. What we learnt from the study is that the policy 'beneficiaries' must be understood in their entirety, that is, in the

richness of their personality dimensions: relational, affective, cognitive, operative. Putting young participants at the centre of the political agenda also means strengthening educational strategies and restoring symbolic and substantial value to schools and training institutions.

Our findings also suggest that LLL policies do not have to attempt to encourage a 'standard' life course but should take into account the different needs arising from the processes of de-standardisation and reversibility of individual life transitions. This means that European policies, while facing similar challenges in all countries, should be adapted to national, regional and local levels and to the individual situations of young adults. Fundamental to acting on both the economic and sociocultural levels is the enhancement of a place-based territorial approach that pushes different actors (employment agencies, training bodies, companies, trade associations, local authorities, universities, third sector organisations) to cooperate and invest their resources in the direction of exploiting untapped energies and converting them into opportunities to develop the local community.

The regional face of LLL

Governance theories are helpful to understand the implications of regional polarisation for LLL policies. At the same time, these theories illustrate the contradictions that the design of these policies often entails in 18 diverse settings.

To start with, there is evidence of persisting, even aggravated, disparities between the regions of the EU. For instance, Chapter 9 reported significant regional variation of indicators of early school leaving, NEET (neither in employment nor in education and training), and youth and tertiary education achievement within EU member states. In addition, Chapter 9 found strong evidence of path dependency. That is, current policies do not seem to tackle a significant gap in young people's social conditions between prosperous and peripheral regions.

Why are policies unable to tackle these social divides? Governance theories suggest a couple of explanations. First, policy designs are unable to counteract wider processes that significantly impinge on the opportunities of young adults in the labour market. Migration towards northern countries and global cities is a key development in this sense. Second, it is also noticeable that LLL policies cannot easily exert influence on the main decisions of firms regarding the location of headquarters and operational units.

Governance theories also spell out significant contradictions within LLL policy designs. Unsurprisingly, these policies entail such diverse endeavours that the main actors do not always understand the concepts and principal goals in the same terms. Thus, Chapter 4 noticed how street-level professionals construe a hierarchy between employment and education. Sometimes, vague policy rationales and narrow opportunities lead some professionals to elaborate derogatory images of beneficiaries. Chapter 6 spelled out a sharp contradiction that opposes important assumptions about life courses, the point being that, currently, all age groups increasingly depart from standard life courses that had previously proceeded through clearly defined transitions between education and employment as well as between employment and retirement. However, mainstream policies often understand youth as a stage of life that starts with upper educational programmes and concludes with stable participation in the labour market. Therefore, policies eventually convey de-contextualised expectations of young adults' life plans. Chapter 10 added further insights on these contradictions, with the authors highlighting that policies and young adults attribute different meanings to education and employment. For the former, these are frequently core concerns, while the latter often build their identity on other aspects of life (e.g. leisure, family, autonomy). Eventually, both professionals and beneficiaries of LLL policies feel deeply uneasy because their views do not match at all. Chapter 11 also documented how subtle and contextual interactions between experts and young adults render variable outcomes. Instead of converging on the same expectations automatically, each party expresses both satisfactory and frustrating experiences depending on local realities, institutional constraints and pedagogic processes.

Why does empirical evidence find such important contradictions and disagreements? Governance theories shed some light on this finding by reminding us of the inevitably interactive features of policy-making. An array of actors intervene in the design and implementation of policies. These actors bring their own assumptions and their own interests to the policy arena. Therefore, such remote policy makers as EU institutions and even national authorities may easily lapse into wishful thinking with regard to the underlying messages that policies send to young adults. While the official discourse takes consensus for granted, the views of professionals are not always aligned with the views of beneficiaries in real interactions at the level of front-line services.

Concluding remarks: LLL policies helping young adults find their Ithaca

Ithaca is the home of the Greek hero Odysseus, who sails for ten years after the fall of Troy before he can reach his destination and reassert his place as king. Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey* tells of the adventures, learning experiences, failures and successes of Odysseus and the crew of his 12 ships.

Odysseus sets sail full of hope and happiness, believing that in a short time he will reach Ithaca. However, he encounters obstacles and his journey lasts for ten years. One of the first events in his adventures takes place in the Island of Lotus Eaters, where the dwellers cook a dish made of lotus flowers that makes those who eat it forget their past life and wish to stay there forever. When Odysseus and his ships arrive at the floating island of the master of winds, King Aeolus, he is willing to help them by trapping the winds in a leather bottle to prevent them from harming their ships. However, while Odysseus is asleep his crew opens the bottle, curious to know what is inside, and the strong winds blow the ships back to the island, where Aeolus refuses to help them again and sends them away. A further adventure takes place when Odysseus and his crew reach the Sirens' Island. The Sirens lure passing crews and ships by singing songs in order to keep them on their island. The cave of the monstrous Cyclops is another stop on their journey, where Odysseus and his crew are trapped and can only escape by outwitting and blinding the Cyclops.

Along their life courses, young people experience similar challenges – academic, personal, social and emotional – which may be compared to Odysseus's adventures. Life courses may thus be equated to reaching one's personal Ithaca, a goal that gives meaning and direction to one's life and pursuits. Like Odysseus, who counted on the goddess Athena as his protector and on many others who helped him overcome obstacles and reach his home Ithaca, young adults need support, wisdom and guidance, but also courage and good winds to succeed in finding their personal Ithaca.

Do LLL policies help young adults to find their Ithaca? Do these policies help the beneficiaries to navigate the seas towards a destination of their choice? Are these policies effective in helping young adults in vulnerable positions, that is, those who suffer substantial risk of social exclusion?

The chapters in this volume suggest a rather nuanced answer. These policies have a chance to be effective if their design and implementation meet at least three conditions, in line with the main

recommendations of the research reported in this book. In short, these conditions have to do with information, professional awareness and governance. CPE, LCR and governance theories strongly invite researchers and practitioners of LLL policies to discover two-way connections between official policies and young adults' actual learning. Although at first sight well-designed policies may contribute to one's learning beyond the limits of compulsory schooling, it is crucial that experts become aware of the deep changes that people's life courses are undergoing. The very process of LLL must be elaborated anew if these transformations are to be properly addressed. The nature of evidence-based policy, participation, governance and active labour market policies needs substantial revision.

A first lesson has to do with the regional dimension of evidence for evidence-based policies. Since heterogeneous actors make crucial decisions on LLL at the regional level, all of them must draw on appropriate sources of information to share and discuss their views. Currently, many regional authorities and stakeholders are inevitably blind to this aspect of LLL, because most EU regions lack these sources. A second, crucial message is related to young adults' life courses and participation. Many people no longer follow a linear pathway between education and employment. Policies that rely on any assumption of standard patterns on these grounds threaten to backfire by multiplying misunderstandings. In this vein, it is advisable that young adults themselves participate at least in the monitoring and evaluation of the policies. Since they are active subjects of their own life plans, they may develop a new sense of engagement if they truly participate in policy-making. Furthermore, the informational basis of policies will become significantly broader if the voice of the main protagonists is genuinely heard. The third lesson concerns governance. Currently in the EU, the bulk of public employment services aim at underpinning LLL. However, these authorities do not maintain the same relationships with networks of stakeholders throughout the whole territory. Regional realities are not the same everywhere. While apprenticeship schemes often develop encompassing networks, many stakeholders do not easily find a common ground in south-eastern and south-western Europe. The current situation is unstable. Networks may flourish in some regions where social conditions are bleak. However, if these networks do not consolidate a debate grounded on real regional challenges, it is likely that denigrating stereotypes, contradictions and biased assumptions will eventually come to damage the main understandings of LLL. A further lesson relates to active labour market policies. So far, in many countries these policies aim at activating youths so that they

can cope with the requirements of the available jobs in their regional context. However, it is important to notice that policy-making also impacts on which jobs are available in these places. It is not realistic to expect that young people are the only responsible agents. If new opportunities are to emerge in the majority of regions within the EU, both sides of the labour market must meet in the middle.

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"A good reference point for future work on policy document formulation and transition to implementation. A great contribution to international policy studies and comparative education."

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This comprehensive collection discusses topical issues essential to both scholarship and policy making in the realm of lifelong learning (LLL) policies and how far they succeed in supporting young people across their life courses, rather than one-sidedly fostering human capital for the economy.

Examining specific yet diverse regional and local contexts across Europe, this book uses original research to evaluate differences in scope, approach, orientation and objectives. It examines the embedding of LLL policies into the regional economy, the labour market, education and training systems and the individual life projects of young people, with a focus on those in situations of near social exclusion.

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