

Overview of Structure and Topics for Newsletter No. 4 – December 2017

Editorial

Dear Readers,

We are glad to present you the fourth Newsletter of the project YOUNG_ADULLLT with which we want to keep you informed about current events and outcomes of our project.

YOUNG_ADULLLT aims at critically analysing current developments of LLL policies in Europe in order to prevent ill-fitted policies from further exacerbating existing imbalances and disparities as well as at identifying best practices and patterns of coordinating policy-making at local/regional level.

Currently, many young adults face difficulties in their transition from schooling to working life and a large number of them leave formal education either too early or lacking the necessary and adequate qualifications and skills to enter the labour market successfully. Against this background, YOUNG_ADULLLT focuses on Lifelong Learning (LLL) policies across Europe as they are aimed at creating economic growth and social inclusion especially for those groups in vulnerable positions. In particular, the main objective of the project is to yield insights into their implications as well as intended and unintended effects on young adult life courses.



For the last 20 months, we have made considerable progress in implementing our plans by successfully completing the fieldwork. Fifteen partner institutions from nine European countries, representing a variety of institutional and national contexts, have been working together to finalise the project's second phase on data collection, treatment and analysis. It has been challenging and enjoyable and we have happily created a strong research and operational alliance as we look forward to drawing together the projects results for both, the comparative analysis and its public communication and policy information.

You can find more information about our consortium, work plan and progress, expected impact and current news at the project's website: www.young-adullt.eu.

Best regards from the YOUNG_ADULLLT dissemination and coordination team

Contact: info@young-adullt.eu Website: www.young-adullt.eu

Newsletter No. 4 / December 2017

1. Project News	3
Fieldwork completed.....	3
National and European Advisory Boards of YOUNG_ADULLLT	5
Current activities.....	6
Next steps	7
2. “Growing up in crisis” – Young Adults 10 years after the financial crisis	8
3. Asking the experts: Our European Advisory Board on the impact of the financial crisis on young people.....	11
3.1 The impact of the financial crisis on Spanish young people.....	12
3.2 Portuguese young people in times of austerity.....	15
3.3 Young Italians NEETs. The Importance of territorial differences.....	18
3.4 Does education serve as a safety net during financial crisis?	23
3.5 The financial crisis and its aftermath – the impact on young adults’ lives in Croatia.....	26
4. A New Political Economy of Skills?	30

1. Project News

Fieldwork completed

Over the summer, all research teams have been busy with interviewing young adults and experts attending and working in the different LLL policies as well as collecting quantitative data on the young adults living conditions. With the project entering its second year this spring (April 2017), the conceptual and theoretical set-up of the project was completed and research activities turned towards the empirical phase of data collection and analysis paving the ground for achieving the goal of the fieldwork completion.



In June 2017, the projects first Policy Brief with initial results from the sub-study on cross-national analyses of lifelong learning (LLL) policies in Europe was published (Work Package 3). The policy brief identifies policy relevant findings within the research and offers recommendations. For instance, one result of the analysis is that the different definitions of LLL and the heterogeneity of LLL policies make it difficult not only to identify LLL policies, but also to fulfil the needs of the target population. In particular two visions of LLL policies were



identified: the first one mainly focussing on personal development of human beings (especially along the principle of equal opportunity and democratisation) while in contrast the second one focus on economic growth and market competitiveness an thus promotes a rather “utilitarian vision that places more emphasis on the instrumental and short-term aspects of learning/training” (Kotthoff & Carrillo Gáfaró, 2017, p. 2). As a result, they recommend, that LLL policies objectives should also be developed along long-term goals of personal development to solve economic issues, as public policy goes beyond current labour market demands and the

economic crisis (ibid, p. 5). The Policy Brief can also be found on the projects website: <http://www.young-adulllt.eu/publications/policy-briefs/index.php>

We completed the collection of national and regional quantitative data and National Briefing Papers on living conditions of young adults (Work Package 4). The aim has been to identify local risk profiles by describing the structural implications on young adults living conditions.

As different regions have different risks for their young adults living, learning and working there, they can create vulnerable situations for them: Growing up in a specific region can be make-or-break for young adults in creating their life course as some regions make it easier to create ‘successful’ life projects than others do. Currently, the international comparison of the living conditions is in its finalising stages and with its completion, we are going to reach *Milestone 3* of the project.

The first major step for the completion of the fieldwork were the interviews with young adults and experts of each chosen LLL policy in order to complement the perspective of the young adults (Work Package 5). Overall, the partner interviewed over 150 young adults and 100 experts to understand the policies’ fit and potentials from their perspective. By focusing on young peoples’ learning histories we see, how the local context can shape their needs, interests and opportunities, what kind of experience they have and which uncertainties their face. Understanding the young adults’ social realities allows providing recommendations for tailoring effective LLL policies.

Parallel, we analysed how countries govern the relationship (match and mismatch) between the demand side of the labour market and the supply side to support the transitions of young people across the education, training, and labour market systems (Working Package 6). By conceptualising this relationship as a local skill ecology, main actor and institution involved in the skills system were identified, their policy orientations analysed and the forms of coordination identified. This contextualisation will help us assessing to what extent the context influences the governance of the skills system and vice versa, as well as acknowledging similarities and differences across Functional Regions. Currently, the National Reports in the national strategies to govern the supply of skills are completed and the partners work on its international comparison. A brief presentation of initial findings on the concepts of skills from Jan Peter Ganter de Otero (University of Münster) and Queralt Capsada-Munsech (University of Glasgow).

The parallel work has been challenging and we have made considerable progress in implementing our plans by successfully completing the fieldwork.

In the last 6 month, the focus has been on the young adults’ themselves, their needs, their living conditions and the obstacles they face. Whether by interviewing them in person and giving their needs a voice or by talking with experts and policy-makers about their needs – their transition from education to work in an age of uncertainty was leading our work. Therefore, this Newsletter has the overall theme of ‘growing up in crisis’ to explore the effects of the economic

crisis on young adults from different angles. This topic is opened by a contribution of Xavier Rambla, Autonomous University of Barcelona with the question 'Why should Europe care for the future of young adults?' One highlight of this Newsletter is that we were able to include the perspectives of our European Advisory Board (EAB) on the impact of the financial crisis on young adults. Pepka Boyadjieva (Bulgaria), Vitor Sérgio Ferreira (Portugal), Fabio Massimo Lo Verde (Italy), Pau Serracant (Spain) and Renata Ozorlic Dominic (Croatia) describe changing contexts and changing life courses from their national perspective.

National and European Advisory Boards of YOUNG_ADULLLT

The National Advisory Board (NAB) of YOUNG_ADULLLT consists of a number of internationally acknowledged experts, who – as critical friends – will act as an advisory group periodically providing inputs and new or wider perspectives to the activities of the project. Each projects' country has its own national board with renowned experts and exchange regularly along the research process. The involvement of the NAB aims at maximising the social and public impact of the project and its results for the stakeholders in each research site and beyond. They support us mainly in two ways: first, as critical friends and, second, as bridge-builders to the local/regional community. Additionally, one NAB per country is part of the European Advisory Board (EAB) of YOUNG_ADULLLT in order to highlight and discuss emerging issues across the national and regional levels and to incorporate these implications in the research process, an in such, as facilitators of the European Dimension of the project.



The first Kick-off meeting of the EABs took place in June, as they participated at the projects' Third Consortium Meeting in Granada, Spain. Their participation was a highlight of the program as they provided us with very specific advice, brought in fresh ideas, supported us to take a step back as well as inspired next projects. Their feedback was collected around the following 'to do list' for the project:

- what needs to be done,
- what needs to be done in the upcoming weeks, and
- their wishes for the project.

In spring 2018, they are going to provide us their feedback in a Review Report marking the project's 4th Milestone which implies the successful completion of the first two years of the project's lifetime. The feedback is going to include feedback on the project's research process with regard to accomplishments as well as critical recommendations.

Current activities



The Fourth Consortium Meeting of the project was held in Genoa, Italy from November 15-17, 2017 and marked the completion of the fieldwork. “Now that we completed the data collection phase of the YOUNG_ADULLT project”, as coordinator Prof. Marcelo Parreira do Amaral stated, “we successfully paved the way for our comparative analyses and the dissemination of results”. The Consortium was welcomed by the local team led by Professor Mauro Palumbo in the historical premises of the University of Genoa.

The lively discussions exemplified how the projects three-angled view – individual, structural and institutional – was successfully translated into the empirical fieldwork, especially regarding its interlinkage to the three chosen theoretical perspectives: Cultural Political Economy on LLL

policies, Life Course Research on young adults, Governance Perspective on regional/local landscapes of policy-making. The Consortium Meeting was a full success paving the way into the next phase of the project. We are now looking forward to drawing together the projects results for both, the comparative analysis and its public communication and policy information.

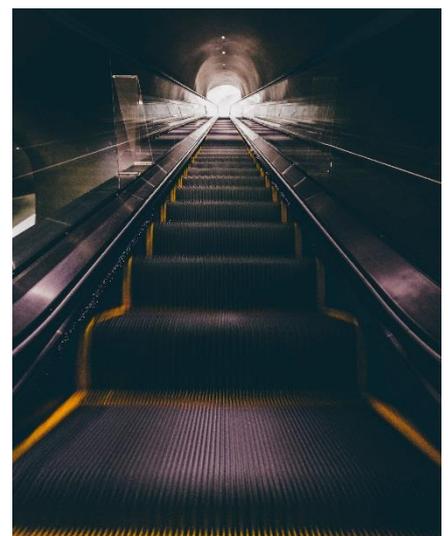
A highlight of the work programme was a policy roundtable at the Salone Orientamenti on November 15, 2017.¹ The Salone Orientamenti is one of Italy's most important event for presentation of academic programs, national guidance schemes and the promotion of informed choices for future careers among young people; the event counted with more than 70.000 visitors.²



Inspired by the discussions during the Third Consortium Meeting in Granada as well as the EABs feedback, the Kick-off Meeting of the Early Career Researcher Group was held one day before the Fourth Consortium Meeting on November 15th, 2017. A group of junior researchers met under the motto of three c's: capacity-building, collaborating and collecting ideas for our formation as a group. The Meeting was hosted Mauro Palumbo and Sebastiano Benasso providing a workshop on research methods paying particular attention to case study designs. In the afternoon, we were discussing ideas for future collaborations, such as joint-publishing and focusing on our overall objectives as a group.

Next steps

The next steps include the preparation of the international reports of the Working Packages 5 and 6 and the integration of the results from the previous Work Packages in the case studies (Work Package 7). This aims to provide the basis for regional reviews of policies and programs, networks of actors and individual life projects of young adults for an ideal-typical modelling of coordinated policy-making. In spring 2018, departing from the overall completing of these Working Packages, we start to conduct the projects comparative analysis (Work Package 8) and its dissemination in Policy Roundtables (Work Package 9).



¹ See press release at: <http://www.orientamento.liguria.it/evento/politiche-giovanili-e-orientamento-un-confronto-europeo/>

² See <http://www.orientamento.liguria.it/>

2. “Growing up in crisis” – Young Adults 10 years after the financial crisis

Why should Europe care for the future of young adults?

Xavier Rambla, Autonomous University of Barcelona

Unlike older generations, currently the youth have to pursue an autonomous life in the midst of economic uncertainty. Careful accounts of both their individual experiences and the new modes of economic hardship are extremely important to make sense of their problems. At the same time, if Europe expects to build a knowledge society on the grounds of social inclusion and sustainability, these problems are not only personal but true societal challenges. Can lifelong learning policies tackle these challenges?

The answer to this question cannot be optimistic at all if lifelong learning policies are mostly targeted to fit young adults into the opportunities that labour markets open for them in the time span of a few years. Many initiatives in the fields of guidance, training, welfare and education basically expect that they ‘learn’ to follow the guidelines, to perform the skills, to invest social benefits on their own empowerment, and to improve their level of instruction. These initiatives often aim at implementing the Youth Guarantee Scheme by changing young adults’ experiences and routines so that they get the most out of the institutional pathways that decision-makers have previously designed for them.

This newsletter is disseminating the driving ideas of a research project that is precisely exploring to what extent this approach guarantees the well-being of young adults in a number of local contexts in the European Union. The research inquires whether they are offered realistic alternatives or they are labelled as a problematic target group. In addition, a number of empirical observations attempts to spell out if young adults become more autonomous thanks to this scheme. Other research questions explore how the providers of lifelong learning coordinate their services in favour of the people who are currently in their twenties.

While our partners and our expert advisor boards (and hopefully, some wider sectors of the general public) are waiting for the potential research findings that will be published in 2018, it is already plausible to posit a few reasons for caution. Beyond the particular evidence that our analyses may eventually produce, we must be aware that top-down, short-term strategies are unlikely to succeed. These are very general remarks, but it is interesting to write them down in advance. The point is that lifelong learning policies risk becoming irrelevant if decision-makers are unable to deal with two challenges, namely the growing sources of uncertainty and the inevitable dilemmas of sustainability.



Uncertainty is clearly at stake. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2012) coined a variety of graphic metaphors to portray the multiplication of uncertain biographical crossroads. Currently, many people are no longer living in such a stable world as their parents thought to live some decades ago. A key sign of these new social conditions is the

demise of linear transitions from a relatively brief age of youth, basically featured by meaningful personal changes, to an allegedly longer and more stable age of adulthood. Nowadays, many twenty-year-olds experience indefinite periods of non-linear changes between education and work, independent and parental dwelling, local and international activities and variable personal arrangements.

For decades, youth policies have responded to the needs of people who were experiencing a brief transition. Basic information on the labour market became necessary when economic crisis disrupted that passage in the 1970s. In accordance to those views on the life course, the youth also needed support for studying, travelling, enjoying leisure and setting up their own home. These measures were designed in order to help twenty-year-olds because stability was not foreseen before the age of thirty. Recently, lifelong learning policies respond to the needs of people who are not properly settling down but entering and leaving education and the labour market at varied moments and following diverse patterns of personal life. Are these policies correctly tailored to guarantee their rights? In the view of the Young Adults project, some of them are likely to do so, while others are not, but the local context probably makes a big difference. The answer to these empirical questions is not yet available.

However, the coincidence of a growing uncertainty and a spreading concern with learning throughout the life course suggests a more general reflection. Whatever the particular cases in a sample of local contexts, it is risky to assume that young adults feel comfortable with schemes that expect to guide and train them from outside. Do they simply need the type of information that youth work produced in the seventies? Are they asking that those forms of support be available for more years? Do they only have to wait longer? Are they living that transition until a later age? It is obvious that lifelong learning policies may be extremely arbitrary if their rationale simply consists of a series of affirmative answers to question marks like the preceding ones. As a rule, any endeavours people undertake for large periods of their lives are futile without some feeling of coherence. Therefore, new designs of lifelong learning

policies are flawed unless some forms of participation are open for the very beneficiaries of these policies. Institutional coherence requires that they feel they are doing meaningful activities so as to learn in a coherent way for their wider purposes. If Europe is to navigate these social changes, the design of lifelong learning policies has to be continuously revised through a continuous dialogue between the beneficiaries and the designers of the Youth Guarantee Scheme.

In 2016, the Global Education Report (GER, 2016) pointed out the dilemmas of sustainability for education and lifelong learning. That report argued that all the sectors of the Sustainable Development Goals are connected with one another. Thus, poverty, health and nutrition are intertwined. Growth and inequality are more deeply associated than previously expected. Environmental issues cannot be tackled regardless of production and inequality. That report also highlights the potential contribution of education to end hunger, to underpin social justice and economic performance, to reduce inequality, to produce affordable and clean energy, and to foster sustainable cities.

In this vein, education is not restricted to the short list of effects on income and productivity identified by human capital theory. The values of creativity and innovative problem-solving are also noticed. Education underpins sustainable development insofar as educated people are able to do their job much better, but also insofar as they are able to use transport, look for housing and participate in public spaces in new ways that save energy and promote healthy lives. As a consequence, the exclusion of the youth from employment, education and training is not only an indicator of possible ulterior problems of social inclusion. It is also a key shortcoming that threatens to dampen the synergies we have to build between heterogeneous but compatible sustainable development goals.

In short, Europe should care for the future of young adults for very good reasons. This is one



Xavier Rambla,
Associate Professor,
Autonomous
University of
Barcelona, Spain

of the better solutions to the type of challenges that a more uncertain society inevitably posits. But the youth have to become full participants if this policy is to be coherent over time. Moreover, caring for young adults is also necessary in order to avail of the untapped creativity that is urgently needed. We must learn to craft new connections between the institutional sectors dealing with social inclusion, public health, nutrition, education, gender equality, the productive economy, inequality and a wide array of environmental issues. This collective endeavour is not achievable without them.

References and further reading

Bauman, Z. (2012) Youth Unemployment- The Precariat is Welcoming Generation Y, *Social Europe Journal*, 22 May 2012. URL: <https://www.socialeurope.eu/youth-unemployment-the-precariat-is-welcoming-generation-y> Retrieved on 15 July 2017

Global Education Report- GER (2016) *Education for people and planet: creating sustainable futures for all*. Paris: UNESCO.

3. Asking the experts: Our European Advisory Board on the impact of the financial crisis on young people

Our European Advisory Board involve experts from different fields, such as universities, governmental institutions or youth agencies. What they all have in common is that they are experts in the broader field of lifelong learning, policies and young adults. In combining their different perspectives, they provide us with valuable external consultancy and critical support to strengthening the European dimension of the project. Their contribution in this Newsletter aims to raise country specific important questions on the issue of the financial crisis and its impact on young adults and thus, pointing to new and fruitful directions. In the following contributions, we first learn how the societal changes produced a precarious generation, due to a ‘generational rupture’ in Spain and the contrast of the globalization process with the familistic youth welfare regimes, while in Portugal the social and economic structure forces more and more to search for labour abroad. For Italy, the differences of regional and local economics and societies widens the gap between a rather wealthy North-Italy and unwealthy South-Italy, especially affecting the trajectories of young mothers living in the South who are affected by the differences in the effectiveness of regional policies. In contrast to the Mediterranean countries, the articles on the impact of the financial crisis in Eastern Europe emphasise the increase of school enrolment as a parallel, yet contradictory development to the rising unemployment rates. In Bulgaria, education becomes a ‘safety net’ for young adults facing uncertain labour market conditions. In Croatia, a higher amount of over-qualified graduates can be observed as well, mainly due the increase of funding of higher education in lieu with their rather newly EU membership, which however lead to an emigration process of graduates into other counties.

These different perspectives show clearly how economic changes unfold differently in different political, social and economic context creating vulnerable positions for young adults regardless of their educational attainment.

3.1 The impact of the financial crisis on Spanish young people

Pau Serracant, Catalan Youth Observatory

The financial crisis in Spain has strengthened some of the processes that started decades ago. It was at the end of the 20th century that some scholars warned about the possibility of a generational rupture (Petras, 1996 and Subirats *et al.*, 2002). Twenty years later, despite the



worsening of the living conditions and life opportunities of the younger generations, the issue of a generational rupture is rarely spoken of in the media and political arenas. Partly, this is due to the fluctuations of the economy and of the labour market (90's crisis, followed by an extremely expansive cycle that ended

with the financial and economic crisis in 2007), which have caused the situation of young people also to fluctuate.

However, even during the highest peaks of the economic growth (which now is known that in Spain was artificial, based on the housing bubble), many young people were in a situation of vulnerability (Miret *et al.*, 2007). It is also true that the increasing precariousness of the younger generation has not reached the whole of the middle classes and the upward social mobility is still happening, even among some young people from a working class origin (Martínez-Celorio and Marín, 2013). These situations help to disguise a general situation of social downward mobility among the younger generations. Finally, from a European perspective, this issue is only clear in the Southern and Eastern European countries, where the new economic model generated by the globalization process (externalization of the productive processes, migrations fluxes, robotization, growing importance of the financial economy vs. the productive economy, etc.) has weakened even more the *familistic youth welfare regimes* characteristics of these countries (Serracant, 2015). Moreover, they are clearly biased by age as they tend to prioritize the contributive policies and programmes (those based on taxes paid through the life course) that mostly benefit the elderly (like unemployment benefits, pensions or the public health system) more than the non-contributive policies and programmes (like active labour market policies, grants or housing policies) that mostly benefit young people (see SEEPROS database, Eurostat). In short, the processes of concentration of richness

characteristic of the last decades are changing the social context where the new generations are born and grow, and this directly affects their situation, opportunities, expectations and behaviour.



"Hedonistic austerity" - Uncertainty puts young adults at risk of creating a stable future and forces them into financial restriction

Certainly, in this new context youth trajectories are affected: in the Spanish case, the growing uncertainty and vulnerability of young people has reinforced the traditional trajectories of transition into adulthood and weakened the experimental ones (Moreno, 2012), based on an increase of the resources and available choices, trajectories that had started decades ago in Central and Northern Europe. The existence of a high amount of precarious jobs poorly paid and with lower qualifications, allow some of the young people to access *pocket money* but do not allow them to develop an autonomous life project: they are somehow forced into a hedonistic austerity. This has an impact in the field of leisure, where a substitution of the payment, out of the home consumptions by free indoors activities is occurring, and where a part of the young people (especially women with an immigrant origin) are excluded from leisure practices and consumptions (López *et al.*, 2013). It also has an impact in the health field, where the risk behaviours of a part of the young people are reinforced but also psychosocial problems linked to the lack of employment, low incomes and the anxiety caused by difficult living conditions and lack of expectations (Espluga and Boso, 2013).

Certainly, this situation of being/feeling left aside from the social and political focus has generated several reactions among the young generations: in Spain and the whole of Europe most of the new forms of political participation and social mobilization that started during the second decade of the 21st century have been led by young people, who are looking for alternatives to the traditional patterns of participation and/or try to influence the decisions that affect them also using this traditional mechanisms. However, passivity, disaffection and demobilization are also occurring among young people, who see how their efforts do not materialize in transformations that have a direct impact in their situation (Soler i Martí, 2013); complementary, populist movements and radicalization also find a friendly context to grow.



Pau Serracant (PhD),
main research officer, Catalan Youth Observatory,
Barcelona, Spain

References and further reading

- Espluga, J. and Boso, À. (2013). “Salut. Entre la satisfacció vital i els impactes de la precarietat sobre la salut de la joventut de Catalunya”. In P. [Serracant \(Coord.\). *Enquesta a la joventut de Catalunya 2012*](#). Barcelona: Direcció General de Joventut.
- López, J.; Cebollada, À. and García, E. (2013). “Cultura i oci. Les activitats de lleure de les persones joves”. In P. [Serracant \(Coord.\). *Enquesta a la joventut de Catalunya 2012*](#). Barcelona: Direcció General de Joventut.
- Martínez-Celorio, X. and Marín, A. (2013). “Orígens de classe, educació i mobilitat social. Ascens i descens social de les persones joves en el context de crisi”. In P. [Serracant \(Coord.\). *Enquesta a la joventut de Catalunya 2012*](#). Barcelona: Direcció General de Joventut.
- Moreno, A. (Coord.). (2012). *La transició dels joves a la vida adulta Crisi econòmica i emancipació tardana*. Barcelona: Fundació La Caixa.
- Petras, James (1996) “Padres e hijos: dos generaciones de trabajadores españoles”. In *Ajoblanco*, num.3.
- Serracant, P. (2015). “The impact of the economic crisis on youth trajectories. A case study from Southern Europe”. In *Young. Nordic Journal of Youth Research*,4(1): 101-118.
- Soler i Martí, R. (2013). *Democràcia, participació i joventut. Una anàlisi de l'Enquesta de participació i política 2011*. Barcelona: Direcció General de Joventut.
- Subirats, Marina; Sánchez, C. and Dominguez, M. (2002) “Classes socials i estratificació”. In S. Giner (Dir.) *Enquesta de la Regió de Barcelona 2000. Informe General*. Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Metropolitans.

3.2 Portuguese young people in times of austerity

Vitor Sérgio Ferreira, Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa

The last decade was difficult for young people in Portugal, as well as in other South European countries. The combination of some circumstances has been characterized by such intense and deep reconfigurations that their effects will hardly be limited to the times in which they take place or reversed in the short or medium term. This is the case of the years that Portugal lived under the set of austerity measures imposed by the “Troika” (constituted by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the Monetary International Fund).

The effects that this package of measures produced in the social and economic structure of the Portuguese society (and of other southern European societies) led me to propose the theoretical hypothesis that the implementation of such austerity policies in this period functioned as a social marker of a generational transition towards a *precarious generation* (Bessant et al., 2017). This is not to say that it was responsible for abrupt ruptures, but rather that it worked as a catalyst of economic and social processes already in course, responsible for the production of a context structurally differentiated from the past.

That is, we are not facing an historical discontinuity directly induced by the economic recession and the austerity measures used to combat it. We are instead witnessing the effects of the intensification and acceleration of trends already felt in the past. These effects produced behavioural and attitudinal patterns largely forged and enhanced by flexibility and deregulation of the labour market induced by austerity measures. And we cannot deny the possibility of such effects, having gone far beyond the economic sphere, may have announced "a social regime of precarious existence" among young peoples' lives, with "deep consequences and hardly reversible, at least in the medium term, in economy, in the world of work, but also in the social and class structures "(Carmo e Barata, 2017: 322-323)

The years under the aegis of austerity measures (2011-2015) corresponded to a social environment where Portuguese young people have experienced increased difficulties in their transitions to adulthood, largely as a result of the sharp growth of youth unemployment and its duration over the life course (Vieira et al., 2015). That problem increased largely even among young people traditionally not so vulnerable towards unemployment as graduated and post-graduated young people (Cardoso et al., 2014). It is in this broader scenario that data from a survey conducted in 2015³ showed a major concern in Portuguese society in that time with the

³ The study *Employment, Mobility, Politics and Leisure: situations and attitudes of young Portuguese in a comparative perspective* was developed during 2015 at the Institute of Social Sciences - University of Lisbon, and funded by the Portuguese Presidency of the Republic.

possibility of job loss – be it in relationship to oneself or to close relatives (sons/daughters, spouse) –, concern that was accompanied by an increased disbelief about the easiness of finding another job in a short time (Ferreira et al., 2017).

This is an attitudinal pattern typical of a scenario of decline on employment and the economic shrinkage of public support measures. Under these conditions the "welfare family", as device of intergenerational solidarity, continues to be called to support its members in areas where the action of the social State is in deficit, non-existent or ineffective. Deconstructing the myth of the existence of a "generation gap", the new structural conditions have brought generations closer together within the family sphere. Not only because the different generations tend to remain more time together through the life course, but also because they build networks of intergenerational solidarity within the family that mitigate more fragile and difficult moments, as unemployment situations for example.

One of the major impacts of the crisis on young people was their search for labour abroad; and this time not only the less educated young people, as it used to happen in the past (Peixoto 2013). Young graduates and post-graduates found a solution for long standing unemployment and looked for better working conditions in immigration (Lopes 2014). Another impact of the crisis found in the 2015 survey was the pre-eminence of instrumental work values like "stability" and "security" even among the younger generation, over expressive work values like “personal fulfilment” or the “interest of the task”.



The ways in which work is valued indicate, however, the social diversity of this generation in terms of vulnerability in the face of emerging conditions. Although generally over-valued, the more instrumental orientations towards labour tend to be more present among young people with lower qualifications and unemployed. On the other hand, although not holding a core value, “personal fulfilment” through work acquires greater importance among young people in most favoured cultural and socio-economic conditions. These are also the ones who tend to express a more optimistic view of the future and believe that the crisis will be solved in a short term in the country. However, in 2015 a pessimistic perspective on the resolution of the crisis situation in a near future prevailed in Portugal.

At the same time, a perception of the causes of youth unemployment as result of structural conditions related to the decrease of the volume of employment was also dominant in the

Portuguese society. This interpretation was far removed from the belief in solutions that implied the individual responsibility of unemployment situation, such as the neoliberal public policies focused on supporting the "entrepreneurship" and the "employability" of young people, the ones implemented by Portuguese government during crises to combat the unemployment.

In fact, scepticism towards and detachment from politics were accentuated among young people during the crises, with a significant shortfall in the attitudes and behaviour of political citizenship. This was revealed by the comparison of some indicators from a survey conducted in 2007 that were retrieved and replicated in the questionnaire of 2015. The picture that emerged this year was that of a political citizenship that weakened over time; a trend that points to the effects of the economic crisis on the perceptions of the Portuguese young people in relation to the traditional political sphere.



Vitor Sérgio Ferreira, postdoctoral researcher, University of Lisbon, Portugal

References and further reading

Bessant, Judith; Farthing, Rys; Watts, Rob (2017), *The Precarious Generation. A Political Economy of Young People*, Routledge.

Cardoso, José Luis; Escária, Vitor; Ferreira, Vitor Sérgio; Madruga, Paulo; Raimundo, Alexandra; Varanda, Marta (2014), «[Employability and Higher Education in Portugal](#)», *Journal of Graduate Employability*, n. 0, pp. 17-31.

Carmo, Renato Miguel; Barata, André (2017), «Teoria social da austeridade: para uma crítica do processo de precarização», *Revista do Serviço Público*, vol. 68, n. 2, pp. 319-342.

Ferreira, Vitor; Lobo, Marina Costa; Rowland, Jussara; Sanches; Idalina (2017), *Geração Milénio? Um retrato social e político*, Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais (in press).

Lopes, João Teixeira (2014), *Geração Europa? Um estudo sobre a jovem emigração qualificada para França*, Lisboa: Editora Mundos Sociais.

Peixoto, João (2013), «Migrações». In *Portugal Social de A a Z - Temas em Aberto*, org. José Luís Cardoso, Pedro Magalhães e José Machado Pais. Paço de Arcos: Imprensa Publishing e Expresso, 154-163.

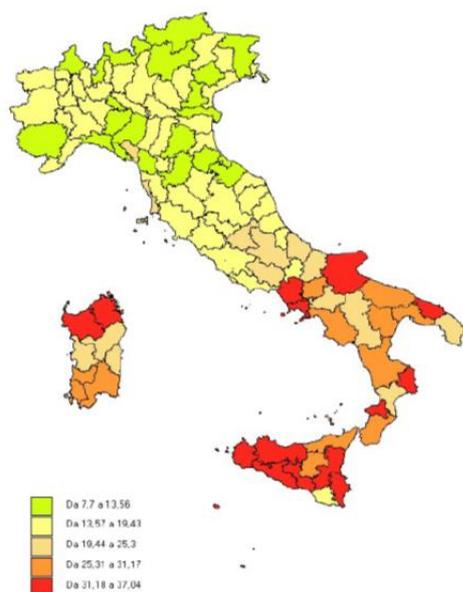
Vieira, Maria Manuel; Ferreira, Vitor Sérgio; Rowland, Jussara (2015), «[Retrato da juventude em Portugal: traços e tendências nos censos de 2001 e 2011](#)», *Revista de Estudos Demográficos*, n.º 54, pp. 5-25.

3.3 Young Italians NEETs. The Importance of territorial differences

Fabio Massimo Lo Verde, University of Palermo

Italy is characterized by a relevant difference among the different regions constituting one of the five levels of articulation of the governmental forms of the territory (European, national, regional, provincial and city level). Regional differences are more apparent especially with regards to the different institutional performances as well as socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions. A more dynamic area, despite some internal differences in terms of socio-economic development and growth rates, includes the regions of North-Mid Italy (Lombardia, Piemonte, Liguria, Valle d'Aosta, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Veneto, Trentino Alto Adige, Emilia Romagna, Toscana, Umbria e Marche). A less dynamic one, also quite diversified internally, including the regions of South Italy and the largest islands (Abruzzo, Basilicata, Molise, Campania, Puglia, Calabria, Sicilia and Sardegna), is characterised by a lower level of socio-economic development and poor institutional performance (Svimez, 2017). Although present in all regions (in the North especially in Liguria, Piemonte and Lombardia), the most significant number of young NEETs are concentrated in the South compared to the total number of young people in the South.

Figure 1 Percentage of NEETs in the total youth population (age 15-29) per province (2009)



Source, Italia Lavoro, 2011

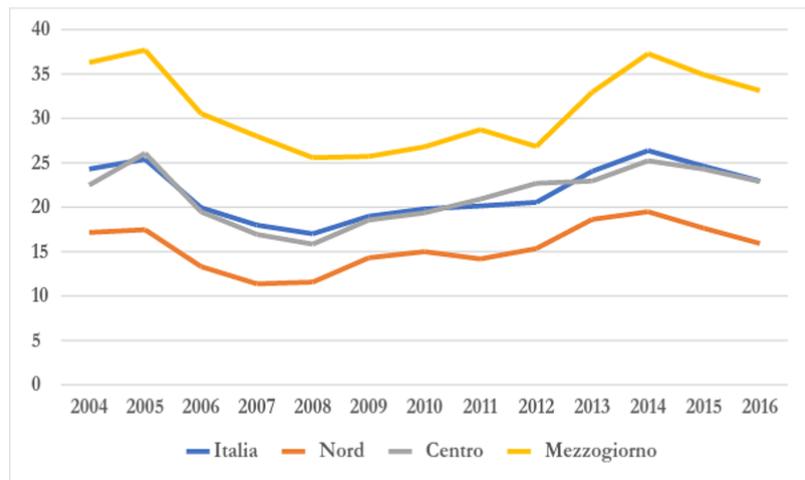
This situation was already pointed out in 2011 in the Italia Lavoro report published by The National Agency of the Italian Ministry of the Economy (Italia Lavoro, 2011), since 2015 changed into ANPAL (Agenzia Nazionale per le Politiche Attive del Lavoro), where it was also specified that differences at regional level existed at provincial level too (see fig. 1), hence showing how different "local economies and societies" may influence territorial distribution.

In 2011 some empirical evidence emerged which is still partly confirmed today. Most NEETs are women with newly-born babies or very young children and unable to reconcile family care and

work; the Neet rate is negatively related to the percentage of student workers present in the territory; the rate difference between males and females tends to increase with age, especially in the South; "discouragement", that is the awareness of no job perspective, has an impact on

the "lack of job search" together with the poor provision of measures meant to allow an easier match between job demand and supply; another element to be considered is "lump labour", that is the high concentration of illegal workers among young people; the NEETs category is made of both poorly educated youth who cannot find a job

Figure 2 Percentage of young NEET (age 15-29) in Italy in the different regional areas (2004-2016)



Source: Eurostat

because they lack qualification and highly educated ones who are over-qualified to meet the needs of the job market; a significant percentage of NEETs is made up of young foreigners living in Italy; the NEET rate is lower where apprenticeship is more diffused; the NEET rate is also related to the low mobility characterising our country; young NEETs, mostly still living within the original family, have poorly educated parents, with low income and a high social vulnerability; a minimal part of them is unable to work or has crime-related problems. (Italia Lavoro, 2011, 6)

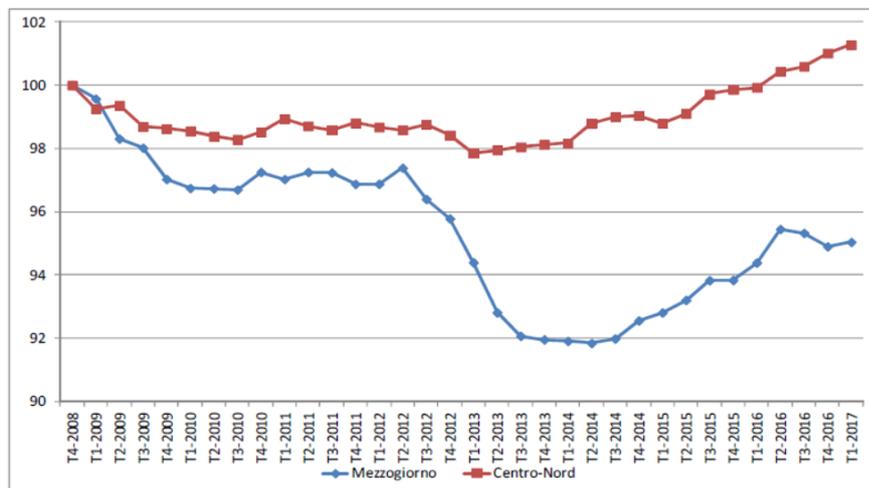
Change in territorial distribution of NEETs seems to show not only the different course of regional economies but also the different institutional performance of the regions. Liguria, for example, in 2014 was the first region for NEET presence among northern ones, overpassing Piemonte (which was the first one in 2013), but in 2016 it ranked behind Piemonte, Marche, Toscana, Friuli, Umbria and Valle d'Aosta. What are the reasons for such regional differences in the formation of the NEET condition? Most of the time it is not only a question of different regional economies (more growth, more occupation) but also a question of differences in the effectiveness of regional policies and the application at regional level of national and European policies.

In general, while the NEET rate in the mid-northern regions reached a peak in 2014, with 20% of the youth population being under this condition, in the same year such a rate rose to 35% in the southern regions (Eurostat, 2016, see fig. 2; see ISTAT, 2017). They were mainly young women. Paradoxically, southern regions invest more money, on average, in education than any other part of Italy. Yet, southern regions have higher rates of early school leaving, which knowingly is one of the causes for entering the NEET condition.

However, in general, it is the economic difference between North and South that counts - as shown by the different level of occupation (see Fig. 3) - as it points out that seemingly economic policies also have an impact on the social system, more than social policies producing effects on the general economic conditions of a region.

As a result, between North and South a difference is emerging in the dynamics involving the NEETs, making it possible for them to get out of this condition (we refer, in particular, to those young people who have lost their job or cannot find one for the first time). Although their rate has increased between 2008 and 2016, the employed people in the age range including the NEETs have decreased up to almost 15% of the total number of employed people. On the

Figure 3 Occupation levels in two regional areas (quarterly data seasonally adjusted T4 2008=100)



Source: Svimez, 2017, p. 28

the NEET condition are very different from North to South as southern NEETs have different characteristics than northern. In the South, their condition is more often the result of a combination of several disadvantaged conditions, some of which are: early school leaving; living in a family socially vulnerable or overtly poor; living in marginalized areas of the city or rural areas with bad economic conditions. In the North, apart from these, other factors seem to be at work related to forms of personal urban discomfort, or psychological/social discomfort, resulting from a "social de-centrality" in the lifecycle which requires forms of intervention other than those that tend to solve the problem in terms of employment or school achievement.

Among the policies adopted to face the NEET "question" by EU national governments, "Youth Guarantee" is a measure, which originated from the 2013 EU Commission Recommendation aiming to contribute to the objectives indicated as priorities such as the increase in employment rates up to 75%, the reduction of early school leaving and poverty rates. According to the second ISFOL report (ISFOL, 2016) as of March 31st 2016, over one million

contrary, in the same period, NEETs have increased up to over 2,5% of the total employed people in the over 35-age range. Indeed, a bad sign for the hopes of NEETs (Svimez, 2017)!

In addition to that, it must also be said that the reasons for entering

young people aged 15-29 have enrolled in the program out of an estimated total of one million and seven hundred thousand. However, if one looks at the measures adopted by regional governments within their general policies for NEETs, the difference between northern regions and southern ones is quite significant, the former appearing as responsibility-oriented and the latter assistance-oriented (Vinci, 2017, 50), thus making clear the different logic adopted by public action. Northern regions have focused on the formation of a job-oriented identity for NEETs promoting extracurricular activities through which they can acquire a series of skills useful for the job market. Higher rates for this kind of activities carried out in the North-East and North-West are clear (see fig. 4). Not only that, while in these regions there has been a remarkable differentiation between the first and second phase of the implementation (the first one with guidance, education, extracurricular training, and the second one with the use of the employment bonus) the same cannot be said for southern regions. Here, the main goal – that is the “de-particularisation” of the entry into the job market through policies of qualification and network-creation among young people – does not seem to have been achieved yet.

Figure 4 Actions Launched by Type of Intervention and by Geographical Macro-Area (%)

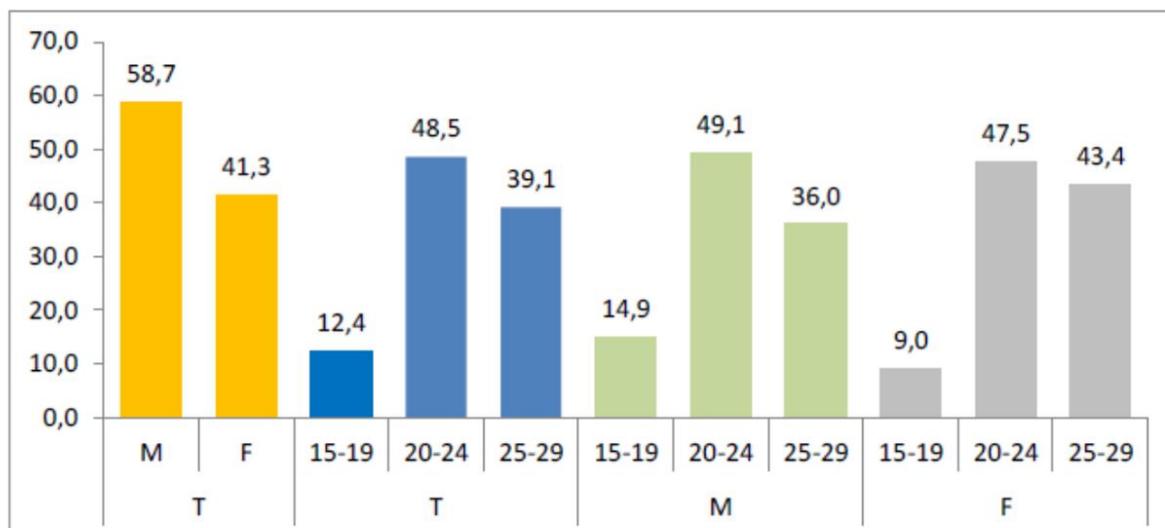
Macro-Area	Placement training	Voc. Educ. & Train	Guidance	Apprenticeship	Extracurricular traineeship	Civil service	Self-employment	Mobility	Bonus	Total
North-West	6.5	5.4	28.7	-	47.0	.7	.0	.1	11.6	100
North-East	16.7	2.8	5.4	.3	62.7	1.3	1.0	.0	9.8	100
Centre	2.4	6.3	10.1	.1	64.9	3.1	.4	.3	12.4	100
South-Islands	5.3	3.0	2.7	.0	76.2	3.1	.3	.4	9.0	100
Total	7.7	4.4	11.7	.1	62.7	2.1	.4	.2	10.7	100

Note: Source: Adaptation from ISFOL 2016 report.

Source: Vinci, 2017, p. 52

As of August 31, 2017, a total of 64.508 applications have been sent, 62.4% of which (40.271) have been confirmed. The total amount of resources allocated for the confirmed applications is 85.3 million euro. Most of the applications come from Lombardia, followed by Campania, Veneto and Piemonte. As a whole, 77% of the applications come from the most developed regions (that is from the North).

Figure 5 Accepted / Confirmed Applications and Financial Resources for Regions (ABSOLUTE VALUE)



Fonte: elaborazioni ANPAL su dati INPS al 31/08/2017

Applications were mostly sent by young people aged 20-24. The age difference is less pronounced among women than among men, showing that for women entering the job market is still more difficult.

Some time is left, and the goal is still that of accompanying economic growth with more effective measures in all five levels of governance (European, national, regional, provincial and city level). Therefore, the YOUNG ADULLLT project has a quite relevant goal.



Fabio Massimo Lo Verde, Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Business and Statistics, University of Palermo, Italy

References and further reading

- ANPAL (2017), Incentivo occupazione giovani, Nota di aggiornamento al 31 agosto 2017, http://anpal.gov.it/Dati%20e%20pubblicazioni/Documents/INCENTIVO-OCCUPAZIONE-GIOVANI_31082017.pdf
- ISFOL (2016), Rapporto sulla Garanzia Giovani in Italia, Roma.
- ISTAT (2017), Noi Italia 2017, Roma.
- ITALIA LAVORO (2011), Neet: i giovani che non studiano, non frequentano corsi di formazione e non lavorano. Caratteristiche e cause del fenomeno e analisi delle politiche per contenerlo e ridurlo, Roma.
- SVIMEZ (2017), Anticipazioni dei principali andamenti economici e sociali dal “Rapporto Svimez 2017 sull’economia del Mezzogiorno”, Conferenza stampa, Roma 28 luglio 2017
- VINCI, F. (2017), Youth and Employment: The Effectiveness of the Youth Guarantee Plan in Emilia Romagna and Sicily, in «Sociology Study» Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 43-55

3.4 Does education serve as a safety net during financial crisis?

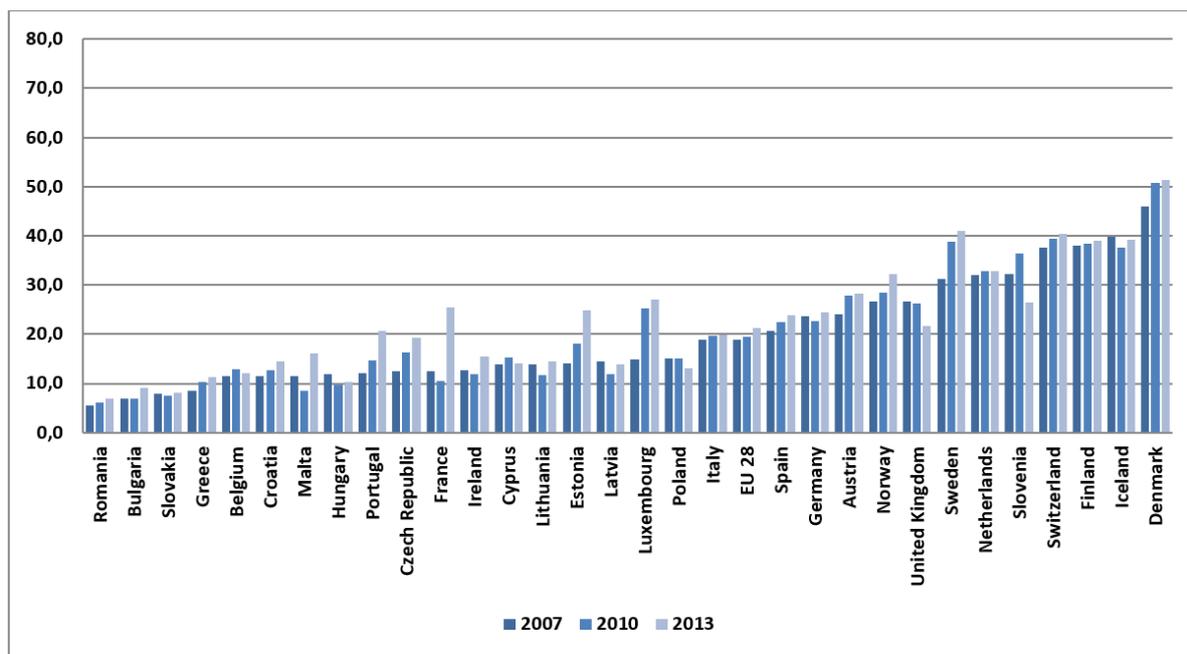
Pepka Boyadjieva, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

In this note, I would like to briefly discuss the complex and contradictory influence of financial crisis and economic recession on education and on young adults' opportunities and attitudes towards continuing their education.

Economic research has shown that “opportunity- cost considerations tend to make schooling countercyclical whereas ability-to-pay considerations have the opposite effect”. (Dellas, H., and P. Sakellaris 2003). This means that the influence of economic recession on young adults' educational opportunities and decisions is contradictory. On the one hand, it is well known that when the economy suffers from a recession, most governments implement austerity measures, which lead to a reduction in state budgets for education. Many firms also cut their budgets for training. In addition, there is a decline in individual and family income. All these trends result in increased tuition fees, a reduction in the number of scholarships and a decreased young people's “ability-to-pay” for their education. On the other hand, however, many studies have revealed that when the unemployment rate rises, school enrolment increases. A recent analysis based on cross-sectional and longitudinal data from the EU-SILC of 28 countries, has found that “young Europeans were more likely to enrol in education in response to the bad labour market conditions brought by the recession. A one percentage point increase in the population's unemployment rate translated in an increase of 0.28 to 0.42 percentage points in the probability of being enrolled in education” (Ayllón & Nollenberger, 2016: 21-22). It is important highlight that the study has also outlined an alarming trend of increasing inequalities in educational opportunities: “boys and girls in households at the lowest end of the income distribution (first quartile) are not equally more likely to be enrolled in education as their richer counterparts” (Ayllón & Nollenberger, 2016: 22).

These findings suggest that during hard times of economic recession, retention and returning to education could serve as a way out and a safety net for young people preventing them from the severe conditions of being unemployed. The comparison of how the participation rate in formal and non-formal education and training of young people from different countries changed during the recent financial crisis (Figure 6) shows that in most of the countries (and in EU average) the crisis did not reverse the trend of increase in the young adults' participation in formal and non-formal education. Although the trend is slow, it is persistent in the majority of the EU countries.

Figure 6 Participation rate in formal and non-formal education and training (last 4 weeks), 25-29



Source: Eurostat Code: trng_lfs_09

However, the general picture (above) should be only a starting point of a thorough sociological discussion of how economic recessions have an influence on education and on individuals' educational decisions. A number of research questions emerge:

- 1) How do economic recessions affect the young people's motivation and decisions towards different levels and types of education?
- 2) How do different education systems react to the changes in young people's educational decisions?
- 3) How has (in)equality of educational opportunities changed? What does participation in education look like through a social justice perspective, taking into account both the inclusion and fairness aspects of social justice in education (Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2017)?
- 4) Do the changes in young people's educational decisions have an impact on quality of education?
- 5) What happens after the recession is over? How does the increased level of enrolment in education pay off at both individual and societal level? Does it translate into higher economic productivity and better employment prospects?

All these questions outline a specific research field. In order to be answered thoroughly, we need both quantitative and qualitative data. While country-representative quantitative data will allow revealing general trends and comparing countries adhering to different economic models and with different welfare regimes, qualitative data will make possible that we hear the voices

of young people and understand how they experience their educational decisions and how they assess their educational and life opportunities.



Unemployment: Creating a safety net through education?!

In the case of Bulgaria, for example, quantitative data clearly show that there is an increase in the participation rate in formal and non-formal education of young adults after the financial crisis (see Figure 6). Obviously, for many young Bulgarians retaining or returning to education did serve as a safety net during the recent financial and economic crisis preventing them from labour market insecurity and unemployment. However, a further look at how the situation on the labour market has changed reveals that after finishing their education young people encounter serious problems finding jobs of good quality. This is especially evident for higher education graduates. On the one hand, it is without a doubt that the group of highly educated people is the least vulnerable group on the labour market due to the low levels of unemployment among them compared with the unemployment among the groups with lower levels of education. On the other hand, in recent years there has been a clear tendency for graduates to be often employed in jobs, which do not require a university diploma (i.e., to be vertically mismatched). A research shows that the odds of being vertically mismatched for a person who graduated in 2012 or 2013 are respectively 1.18 and 1.46 times greater than for one who graduated in 2011 (Ilieva-Trichkova, Boyadjieva, 2017, forthcoming). This also raises the question about the quality of the received higher education and its relevance to the fast changing labour market requirements. In conditions of massification and diversification of higher education, it functions more and more as a positional good (the increase of the number of people who graduate university sharpens the competition between them) and a heterogeneous good (for the labour market inclusion not only the acquired level and specialty matters, but also the higher education institution in which they were acquired). These study results have significant implications for the labour market prospects of recent graduates in Bulgaria. They point to the need for active policies and simultaneously for reforms in cooperation between higher education and the labour market.



Pepka Boyadjieva, Professor,
Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge at the Bulgarian
Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria

References and further reading

- Ayllón, S. and Nollenberger, N. (2016). Are recessions good for human capital accumulation? NEGOTIATE Working Paper 5.1.
- Boyadjieva, P., Ilieva-Trichkova, P. (2017). Between Inclusion and Fairness Social Justice Perspective to Participation in Adult Education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, Vol. 67(2) 97–117.
- Ilieva-Trichkova, P., Boyadjieva, P. (2017, forthcoming). Higher education as a heterogeneous good: Vertical education-job mismatch among graduates. *Sociological Problems*, special issue in English.
- Dellas, H., and Sakellaris, P. (2003). On the cyclicity of schooling: theory and evidence. *Oxford Economic Papers*, 55(1), 148-172.

3.5 The financial crisis and its aftermath – the impact on young adults’ lives in Croatia

Renata Ozorlic Dominic, Education and Teacher Training Agency (ETTA)

In Croatia, the period between 2007 and 2017 can be divided into two parts – the 1st part, from 2007 to 30th June 2013, a period during which Croatia was a pre-accession country to the EU, and the 2nd part, from 1st July 2013 to the present, comprising the 4 years of Croatian membership in the EU. When it comes to key issues related to life courses and career paths of young adults in Croatia, the membership in the EU has significantly influenced developments in this area, from the availability of data comparison and increased EU funding to an alarming level of young graduates leaving Croatia to live and work in economically more prosperous EU countries.

“The Croatian economy has been in prolonged decline, with a GDP decrease of 12 % between 2008 and 2013. Apart from the economic crisis, the labour-market participation is threatened by demographic changes, as the pool of working-age population declines (the part of the population aged 55 to 64 in 2011 stood at 584,000 in comparison to the part of the population aged 15 to 24 that numbered only 505,000). Young people are in a particularly unfavourable position in the labour market, with the unemployment rate for the 15 to 29 age group rising from 15.8 % in 2008 to 35.2 % in 2013, with a NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) rate of 20.9 % (EU average 15.9 %). One of the most prominent

issues in relation to youth unemployment is a lack of work experience – up to 40 % of registered unemployed youth in the 15 to 29 age group have no formal work experience, which is precisely the requirement employers regard as crucial. Unemployment rates and the risk for long-term unemployment are higher for youth with lower levels of education and those with vocational education.”⁴

The lack of practical skills of school graduates and the nonalignment of Vocational Education and Training (VET) to labour market needs have been identified as the main culprits for youth unemployment. However, in the period from 2008 to 2012 the unemployment rate for university graduates has also risen by 162 % and 178 % respectively depending on the type of university programme graduated⁵, which may be a consequence of the slowdown in economic activity and overall lack of jobs in Croatia. In alignment with the EU-level Youth Employment Package of 2012, Croatia has adopted the *Employment Promotion Act* (2012), introducing financial incentives for employers hiring the long-term unemployed and those without work experience. This Act also introduced a measure of *professional training without employment* designed to bridge the school-to-work gap for Croatian graduates under 30 years of age. Beginning 1st July 2013 with the accession of Croatia to the EU, the Youth Guarantee scheme was introduced and funded from the European Social Fund and Youth Employment Initiative.

The *Youth Guarantee Scheme* is a set of measures falling into two broad categories – early intervention and activation (measures for the prevention of early school leaving) and labour market integration (activating the youth through job creation, work based learning, and youth entrepreneurship). The most widespread measure of the Scheme is *professional training*



Working as a professional without employment? – State funded work can lead to precarious situations for young adults when they remain in a phase of training instead of employment.

⁴ Operational Programme Efficient Human Resources 2014 – 2020

⁵ Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, Ministry of Labour and Pension System, Republic of Croatia, 2014

without employment. Since its introduction in 2013, it has enabled many young graduates to gain valuable work experience, complete the 1-year probation period and take the license examination in professions where it is a requirement (e.g., teaching profession). This measure, however, also has its downsides. It has proven to be the least beneficial for the most vulnerable youth (those disadvantaged by low socio-economic background and lower level of education). Due to the fact that the state funds the “salary” for those youth undergoing *professional training without employment*, some employers have resorted to almost exclusively hiring young people under this scheme, as they virtually have no costs related to their work, and no obligation to employ them when the period of their professional training expires. Additionally, this “salary” is significantly lower than the regular average salary in a given sector, so over the years some sectors have suffered a considerable reduction of the average salary. To conclude, this measure, designed and implemented to help youth enter the world of work, has managed to cure some ails, but also created some new ones.

In the pre-accession period, three significant reform initiatives took place in the Croatian education sector – the Bologna process for higher education institutions (2005), new teaching programme for primary school (2006), and the introduction of national upper-secondary-school-leaving examination (2010). The modernisation of the VET sector was also high on the priority list, and was mostly EU-funded. However, due to the lack of effective methods and funds for systematic monitoring and evaluation of the changes introduced, it is difficult to assess the impact these changes have had on the education system in general.

At present, education policy development is in line with the aims of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and the key document defining and directing changes and improvements in education on all levels is *The Strategy of Education, Science and Technology*, adopted by the Croatian Parliament in 2014. The main reform strands of the Strategy are: improving the overall quality of provision education (reducing the effect of socio-economic and regional inequalities); alignment with labour market needs (modernising VET, introducing more effective schemes of work-based learning, and making VET more attractive to young people), quality assessment, and digitalisation of schools and learning. A range of documents has been prepared to support the implementation of the Strategy measures (e.g., draft curricular documents for primary and secondary general education subjects, VET System Development Programme 2016-2020). There is also a national EU-funded project of e-Schools (2015 to 2022) aiming at raising digital maturity of Croatian schools through supplying equipment, staff training and developing e-learning programmes and materials. However, due to the lack of political consensus, general

elections and change of government in 2015, and again in 2016, the implementation of the measures defined by the Strategy and the supporting documents has been delayed.

In the meantime, modest recovery of GDP, the lack of jobs in Croatia that could ensure long-term employment and a satisfactory living standard for young people, combined with the fact that Croats, as EU citizens, do not need work permits for most of the EU countries, have resulted in many young people leaving Croatia to live and work elsewhere in the EU, either to work in their profession (medicine, ICT sector, scientific research) or to accept low-skilled jobs because they would be better paid than in Croatia. In 2015, 35.000 to 40.000 young people of whom 22.000 are university graduates left Croatia⁶. For a country with a population of a modest 4 million citizens, and a history of unfavourable demographic prognoses this does not leave much room for optimism.



Renata Ozorlic Dominic (M.A.), Senior Adviser for International Cooperation, Education and Teacher Training Agency (ETTA), Croatia

References and further reading

European Commission (2014). ESF Operational Programme Efficient Human Resources 2014 – 2020. Internet: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/atlas/programmes/2014-2020/croatia/2014hr05m9op001 (9.10.2017).

Ministry of Labour and Pension System of the Republic of Croatia (2014). Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan. Internet: <http://www.mrms.hr/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/implementation-plan-yg.pdf> (9.10.2017)

Sterc S., 2017: Demographic development of Croatia as the basis for pension system planning, a presentation from the conference Demography and its Reflection on the Pension System held in Zagreb in March 2017, retrieved on 10 August 2017 from the website of UMFO, Association of Pension Funds and Pension Insurance Management Companies www.mirovinskifondovi.hr

⁶ Demographic development of Croatia as the basis for pension system planning, Sterc S., 2017

4. A New Political Economy of Skills?

Understanding and using the concept of “skills” in the YOUNG_ADULLLT project

*Jan Peter Ganter de Otero (University of Münster) &
Queralt Capsada-Munsech (University of Glasgow)*

For the past few decades, the term “skills” has become common language in educational and labour market policies. The emergence of educational reforms in the United Kingdom led by the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) and Further Education Unit (FEU) in the late 1970s and 1980s broadened the meaning of the term “skills” (Payne, 2000, p. 353). The term “skills” has been used (or abused) by policy-makers as a panacea for tackling and trying to solve different kinds of social and economic problems. More recently, the development of a New Skills Agenda for Europe (European Commission, 2016) shows the strength that “skills” represent in today’s economic, political and social imaginary to the point that the OECD, describes skills and productivity as “the real sources of strong, inclusive and sustainable growth” (OECD, 2015, p.3).



The term ,skill’ has different and changing meanings

Nevertheless, despite its increasing importance in educational and economic debates, there is a lack of clear definition of what skills means. Tracing the changing meaning of ‘skill’, Payne (2010) shows that what is now understood as skills is very distinct from its initial practical meaning. In English, “skills” were initially perceived as the capacity of doing something, learned by repetition or assimilation, while “knowledge” was understood as the accumulation of theories. The meaning of the term, however, moved from this very technical perspective to a more interactional idea of skills. Today, skills is being used next to different adjectives (e.g., low/high, key, social, technical, soft, hard...) suggesting very

different meanings and connotations. Payne (2010) concludes that it is exactly its lack of meaning (or the possibility of having different meanings) that enables its use in different contexts.

In the YOUNG_ADULLLT research project, skills are also understood as a relevant concept. However, skills as a concept is not taken for granted but rather based on the theoretical perspective of the Political Economy of Skills.

The Political Economy of Skills is a relatively recent approach, and one of the disciplines that uses the term “skills” in an analytical perspective. According to Brison (2017), the fields of psychology and education are mainly concerned with how individuals develop skills. In addition, skills are also important to the work of economists as they pursue to measure the economic value of skills within Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1962).

In contrast to those disciplinary uses of skills, the Political Economy of Skills is rather concerned about the role of skills in societies. Given the limited dialogue among disciplines concerning skills issues, Francis Green (2013) proposes an interdisciplinary approach to the term “skills” from a political economy perspective, taking into account the contributions from the fields of economics, sociology and psychology. Focusing on the exercise of skills in the world of work, Green (2013) proposes an interdisciplinary definition of skills understanding them as personal qualities that are: 1) Productive of value when used at work; 2) Expandable and enhanced by training and development; and 3) Social, in the sense that they are socially determined. He formalises it as the PES concept of skills and aims at making it functional in economic and social systems. While skills have been usually understood as productive of value and modifiable, it is crucial to raise that what is considered as valuable and promoted in society is socially determined and is not static, as it can vary across time and place.

Therefore, following Green (2013) skills are acquired, valued and used. The amount and type of skills acquired by individuals are conditioned by their attitudes and expectations, but also by their opportunities, which are circumscribed by their social class, gender and ethnicity, among other characteristics. The value of skills depends mainly on the product they produce, and how this product is socially valued. Therefore, what is considered as “skilled labour” might vary across societies. Last but not least, how these skills are used in the labour market is largely affected by the quality of employment relations and the management strategy, which is culturally determined (Green, 2013). In short, skills are what is considered in a society as having value and worth acquiring, which in turn is going to be more easily used in the labour market.

This logic of acquisition, value and use of skills leads us to Green’s skills model. The author frames the analysis of skilled work in the articulation of two markets (i.e. circuits of value): 1) the skills formation market, and 2) the skills deployment market. Employers and skilled workers are located in these two markets and contribute with a given number of hours per month to learning and training (skills formation market) and to the deployment of skilled

labour. Employers are supplying formation in the skills formation market and demanding skills in the skills deployment market, while the opposite applies to skilled workers, who demand learning and supply skilled labour. Depending on the amount of hours per month supplied and demanded in each market, a range of possible (mis)matches might arise, such as employer training barriers, unemployment, skills under-utilization or losses owing to skills shortages.

Partly inspired by Green's framework to analyse skilled work, the YOUNG_ADULLLT research project has developed a framework to analyse the regional governance of skills supply and demand. We are interested in describing and understanding how the regional skills ecology is governed. We consider three main elements in the regional skills ecology:

- 1) Skills system: it is formed by two markets similar to the ones proposed by Green (2013), the skills formation and the skills use market. The aim of this skills system organised in two markets is identifying actors and institutions involved in the regional skills system, their relationships, activities and relations of power.
- 2) Regional socioeconomic context: countries are not homogenous entities and the regions forming it vary in their socioeconomic characteristics. The economic activity, labour market participation or the population structure are relevant features affecting the regional skills supply and demand and, hence, their governance.
- 3) Implications for young adults: the previous two elements are likely to have an influence on young adults' lives. Young adults with similar characteristics might have different opportunities and find themselves in different situations of skills (mis)match given the region in which they are living. However, they might also (in)directly influence the regional governance of skills.

These three elements and the interactions among them help us to describe and understand the regional governance of the skills supply and demand across European regions. Through the identification of relevant actors and institutions, the context in which they interact and the implications their actions have on young adults' lives, a range of governance models can be identified across regions. The main contributions of this framework are: considering the region as a unit of analysis, introducing the role of the context and explicitly considering the implications for young adults.

In conclusion, against the increasing usage of the term "skills" without a clear theoretical approach, the YOUNG_ADULLLT research project finds in the Political Economy of Skills a relevant approach on how skills are acquired, valued and used in different contexts across Europe. Using the concept of skills ecology, we intend to analyse the dynamics between

educational and labour markets policies, and therefore identify the impacts on young adult's life courses.



Jan Peter Ganter de Otero (M.A.), doctoral candidate,
University of Münster, Germany



Queralt Capsada-Munsech, postdoctoral researcher, Robert
Owen Centre for Educational Change (ROC), University of
Glasgow, United Kingdom

References and further reading

- Green, F. (2013). *Skills and Skilled Work. An Economic and social analysis*. Oxford University Press.
- OECD (2015). *The Future of Productivity*. Available in: http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/the-future-of-productivity_9789264248533-en [Accessed on 21.09.2017]
- Payne, J. (2000). The unbearable lightness of skill: the changing meaning of skill in UK policy discourses and some implications for education and training, *Journal of Education Policy*, 15:3, 353-369
- European Commission (2016). *A New Skills Agenda for Europe: Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness*. Available at <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=15621&langId=en> [Accessed on 12.10.2017]
- Becker G. S. (1962). Investment in Human Capital: A Theoretical Analysis. *Journal of Political Economy*, Part 2, 9-49.
- Bryson J. (2017). Disciplinary Perspectives on Skill. In: Buchanan, J. et al (Eds) (2017). *The Oxford*

The YOUNG_ADULLLT Research Consortium



WESTFÄLISCHE
WILHELMS-UNIVERSITÄT
MÜNSTER



Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg
Université des Sciences de l'Éducation · University of Education



GOETHE
UNIVERSITÄT
FRANKFURT AM MAIN



ПЛОВДИВСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ
• ПАИСИИ ХИЛЕНДАРСКИ •



ЮГОЗАПАДЕН
УНИВЕРСИТЕТ
'НЕОФИТ РИЛСКИ'



University of Zagreb
Faculty of Teacher Education



University
of Glasgow



U. PORTO
FACULDADE DE PSICOLOGIA
E DE CIÊNCIAS DA EDUCAÇÃO
UNIVERSIDADE DO PORTO



LISBOA | UNIVERSIDADE
DE LISBOA



Instituto de Educação



Universitat Autònoma
de Barcelona



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI
DI GENOVA



universität
wien



UGR | Universidad
de Granada



Turun yliopisto
University of Turku



europeanresearchservices
gmbh