

Background material to the report:

*Navigating difficult waters:
learning for career and labour market transitions*
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Description of country data

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Table of Contents

1. Danish national report	3
1.1. The Danish sample	4
1.2. The labour market context.....	8
1.3. Support structures – opportunity or barrier for learning.....	17
1.4. Learning for and from radical career change in the labour market	17
1.5. Learning from labour market transitions	27
1.6. Career decision-making styles.....	40
1.7. Transversal themes.....	42
Abbreviation list	46
References.....	46
2. Italian national report	48
2.1. Theoretical context	48
2.2. The Italian context – Recent social and labour market trends	62
2.3. The Italian sample	65
2.4. Analysis of the Italian interviews.....	77
Abbreviation list	95
References	95
3. French national report	98
3.1. Contextual background of the French education and qualification system	98
3.2. The French sample	114
3.3. Experience of labour market transitions.....	124
3.4. Representation of the career journeys of the French sample	125
Abbreviation list	136
References	137
4. German national report.....	138
4.1. The German labour market context	138
4.2. German sample.....	145
4.3. Representation of the career journeys of the German sample	159
4.4. Analysis of the German interviews.....	253
References	267
5. Spanish national report.....	268
5.1. Contextual background of the Spanish education and qualifications system	268
5.2. The labour market context.....	273
5.3. Methodology used in the study	277
5.4. Summary of the profiles selected for the study	280
5.5. Thumbnail sketches	283
5.6. Case studies	287
5.7. Key Factors from Spain	314
Abbreviation list	316
References	316

CHAPTER 1.

Danish national report

In Denmark the key contextual element of their post-compulsory work-related education and training system is their flexicurity model which makes it easy for enterprises to dismiss employees and easy for the employees to move between jobs. The model is based on supporting employees in transitions between jobs through an unemployment support system which steps in the moment that the transitions between jobs are difficult. This is the grand narrative of flexicurity which has been promoted all over the world as a case of good practice. However, the individual narratives in this project shed another light on this model. It is true that transitions between jobs are not perceived as problematic by the interviewees. When it comes to transitions within the same sector or trade, transitions are often smooth enough so as to some extent not even be regarded as representing a clear break often associated with a transition. However, transitions between trades and sectors are regarded as more problematic as the system itself can become a barrier to change. As for the security part of the model, this seems to some extent to have evaporated, given the increase in unemployment following the financial crisis. The interviewees seem prepared to do anything to avoid contact with the public employment services (PES) and where there has been contact this is described by the interviewees as a system principally based on distrust, control and bureaucracy.

The Danes also take pride in their lifelong learning system. The continuous and further education and training system is highly developed and publicly provided – although in the past 10 years the government has introduced fees for both individual participants and enterprises. There exists an extensive system of competence funds which should ensure that all employees have the right and possibility of continuous and further education. Again, this is the grand narrative. However, when the individual narratives of the interviewees are examined, there are many barriers to accessing continuous and further training, especially if it involves an attempt to change career pathways altogether. The system is based on the logic imposed by the trade unions and employers, with continuous career pathways perceived as being constructed as linear within the same line of trade or sector. Changing career in midlife is something which requires willpower, resilience and determination, not to mention resources in all its forms.

Additionally, Danes pride themselves on being a highly equal society in which there is equal access to education and training – though statistics from Eurostat show that in the past 10 years Denmark has slipped from first to 10th place in terms of equality (AE, 2012a). However, in the individual narratives the

existence of social inequality in times of transitions is marked. Social, cultural and economic capital can together play a decisive role in expanding the individual space of opportunity. Today, the market for coaching and guidance services is expanding and to an increasing degree, people purchase these services themselves in times of transitions and in times of career change. There is no such equivalent in the public system for those who cannot afford these services. Individuals are left within the control of the PES and the activation courses that in the individual narratives are represented as 'a waste of time' (Mette, Anna, Mike).

The narratives presented in this report bring forth many paradoxes in the Danish model and education and training system. There seems to be a long way to go in creating a genuine lifelong learning system which provides access to education and training for everyone from cradle to grave.

1.1. The Danish sample

Within the overall criteria defined for the project, the Danish team decided to use two additional criteria for the Danish sample, which were that prospective interviewees should have recent experience with guidance or support in various forms and recent experience of career transition. On this basis, the team contacted respectively E-vejledning (E-guidance) ⁽¹⁾, which is a public guidance portal available for anybody in need of guidance concerning their education and/or career development, and AS3 Outplacement (AS3) ⁽²⁾, a company which provides support for people who have been laid off. The company pays for the outplacement package that has a varied length but which is based on a concept developed by AS3. A third string of the sampling strategy was to recruit purposively through Facebook and our social networks. Purposively, in the sense, that the interviewees should meet the criteria concerning age, education, diversity between city and rural areas, and occupational background.

The final sample comprised 21 interviewees, ranging in age from 34 to 49, with general upper secondary education as the lowest level of education and a Master in Languages as the highest (see Table below).

⁽¹⁾ <http://www.ug.dk/eVejledning.aspx>

⁽²⁾ <http://www.as3outplacement.com/For%20customers>

Composition of the Danish sample

	Anonymisation	Follow up interview	Recruited	Year of birth	Educational background
1	Ken	Mail	Local	1970s	Mechanic
2	Ann		Local	1960s	Bachelor in languages
3	Tom	Telephone	Local	1960s	Retail
4	Mads	F2F	Local	1970s	Electrician
5	Hanne	Mail	E-vejledning	1960s	Optician
6	Hans	Mail	Facebook	1960s	Retail
7	Mike	F2F	Network	1960s	Carpenter
8	Anna	Telephone	Facebook	1960s	Unskilled/recognition of prior learning as clerk
9	Jens	Mail	Facebook	1970s	Carpenter
10	Kate	Mail	Facebook	1960s	Bachelor in languages
11	Jane		AS3	1960s	Bachelor in languages
12	Christina		AS3	1970s	Short term higher educated in marketing
13	Katrine	F2F	AS3	1960s	Short term higher educated in IT
14	Bente	F2F	AS3	1960s	Master of English
15	Iris		AS3	1970s	Unskilled
16	Casper		Facebook	1960s	Boilermaker
17	Erik	F2F	AS3	1960s	Shipping
18	Mette	Telephone	E-vejledning	1970s	Legal secretary
19	Karen	Mail	Network	1970s	Bachelor in economics/physiotherapist
20	Christian		Network	1970s	Teacher and TV-photographer
21	Louise		Network	1970s	Kindergarten teacher

Five interviewees were recruited through Facebook. The two researchers posted the following on Facebook:

We are looking for participants for a European mapping of working life narratives. Do you have a story to tell? We are interested in all kinds of working life narratives. To take part you do have to meet the following criteria: you are between 35 and 45, employed or newly unemployed, have a vocational background or a short or medium-term higher education, and you should not be in a managerial position.

Two interviewees were recruited through E-vejledning to have interview persons who had experience with public support structures and who had actively sought support. Contact was established to E-vejledning who posted our call for interviewees on their website and who recruited through the contacts they made via the portal.

Six interviewees were recruited through AS3 Outplacement in a process organised by their coordinator. She sent a general call to the coaches responsible for the outplacement and after a slow start, the number of persons volunteering for an interview went beyond the requirements of the project. To

ensure correspondence with the selection criteria in the project, the prospective interviewees were asked to fill in a form describing their educational and occupational background. Graduates were not included, but several managers were included as they had a vocational background. The interviewees from AS3 came to represent the consequences of the economic crisis as many of them were dismissed due to the general 10% cut in the public sector or to the consequences of the crisis in the private sector.

Eight interviewees were recruited from a local network in provincial towns in more rural locations to ensure the balance between those living in rural areas and large cities.

The first interviews took place in May-June 2012. The second round of interviews took place in February- March 2013. The transcriptions were sent to all interviewees with an invitation to mail back about reflections on the interview and changes since 2012. On the basis of the themes selected, several interviewees were contacted and a second round of narrative interviews was carried out. For the theme 'Learning from labour market transitions', three of the interviewees contacted through AS3 were re-interviewed with a view to ask them to narrate what they learnt from being in transition.

1.1.1. Interview situation

The interviews took place in different locations: at the university, in the interview persons' homes, in our own homes, at cafés, at AS3, in an office in a provincial town and at the work places of the interviewees. The researchers let the interviewee decide on the setting.

Compared to structured and semi-structured interviews, the researchers experienced that narrative interviews do something else. The narrative approach establishes a situation where the interview becomes more of a dialogue (in Danish *samtale*) and in some cases the interview had a therapeutic character. Many of the interviewees expressed the view that the interview had been beneficial to them and had helped them reflect on their situation.

The fact that the narrative interview worked at the border of guidance and interview made us reflect on the ethics of narrative approaches. One of the researchers experienced two interviews where the persons interviewed told stories in which they showed a vulnerable side of themselves. Afterwards, they discussed two issues: (a) how to deal with this vulnerability in a respectful way in the analysis and (b) the ethics of handing over these interviews to a third party without knowing how they might be used. The first issue was addressed through anonymity and keeping a narrative structure in the presentation of the interviews. The second issue was dealt with by the researcher editing out sections that were too sensitive.

In all the interviews the researcher started out by asking the interviewee: 'Please tell me your working life story.' Many interviewees responded by asking: 'where should I start?' To which the reply was: 'wherever you feel'. Interviewees invariably told their working life story chronologically starting either with leaving school or graduation. Some interviewees included the odd jobs that they had had as teenagers.

1.1.2. Approach to analysis

The narratives are based on interviews with 21 interviewees, which were transcribed and on the basis of the transcriptions short summaries were drawn up. All quotes in the summaries were translated from Danish into English by the researchers. In the summaries the researchers worked with the themes defined within the project: transitions; learning; work-life balance; support. Furthermore, some other themes were identified as recurrent in the interviews, such as communities/colleagues, management, stress, identity, etc. The summaries also included a categorisation of the decision-making style of the interviewee (cf. Bimrose et al., 2008), telling examples and a contextualisation of the narrative.

In the summaries, the researchers already started analysing the interviews and provided input to the project team's understanding of transitions, learning and support structures. In the country report, the researchers went deeper into these themes looking into support structures; radical career changes; learning from transitions. In the analysis, the researchers have under each theme chosen to work from three narratives identified as 'iconic': that is, exemplary of the themes under discussion. These cases are contextualised and trail their narrative into the wider social and political context, hereby exploring the dialectics between structure and agency.

1.1.3. Structure of the Danish report

The Danish report is organised around a description of the sample, the labour market context, three thematic sections (support structures; radical career changes; learning from transitions), career decision-making styles and then a final section on transversal themes. In the thematic sections, the two sections on support structures and radical career changes are based on the full narrative and highlight the aspects related to support and career change, whereas in the section on learning from transitions, the researchers have chosen to work on the basis of the follow-up interview and give a short introduction to each of the interviewees in the beginning. The analysis is from a common-sense perspective (Kvale, 1994, p. 210).

In the last section, we contextualise the cases and draw up the transversal themes which came out of this first common-sense analysis. We propose the theoretical takes that we see feasible in the further analysis of the project.

1.2. The labour market context

1.2.1. Flexicurity and the Danish model

A country's industrial relations or labour market system can be characterised by how regulation is distributed between market mechanisms, collective bargaining and legislation. The Danish model (Knudsen and Lind, 2012, p. 9) refers in part to a labour market model primarily regulated via the system of collective agreements (Due et al., 1993, p. 14), in part a combination of welfare and employment policy, as well as collective agreements, which is labelled 'flexicurity'.

1.2.2. The Danish agreement model

The Danish agreement model is based on characteristics which can be traced back as far as the 1890s. The model includes the following features:

- the parties themselves define the ground rules for the collective negotiations which play a central role in the regulation of wage and employment conditions. While the minimum wage and employment security are regulated through legislation in many countries, in Denmark these conditions are regulated through collective agreements;
- there has traditionally existed a consensus between the trade unions, employer associations and political parties to minimise the role of government;
- the strong stakeholder regulation is supported by relatively high levels of collective organisation among both employees and employers. Approximately two thirds of employees belong to a trade union ⁽³⁾. Organisations are mainly unified (i.e., without religious or political divisions);
- the agreement model comprises rules governing the interaction between shop stewards and management. The principal idea is that cooperation should benefit both parties ⁽⁴⁾;
- the right to strike is regulated in such a way as to support the agreement system (the no-strike commitment) (Knudsen and Lind, 2012, p. 13).

1.2.3. Flexicurity

According to Bredgaard et al. (2007, p. 10), the special balance between flexibility and security was first thematised explicitly in a 1999 publication from the

⁽³⁾ The Danish unemployment insurance funds are administered by the trade unions – the Ghent system.

⁽⁴⁾ Knudsen and Lind (2012) note that it seems paradoxical in this regard that, in its statutes, the Danish Employers' Confederation has included the support of member organisations in their work towards greater deregulation as an objective.

Ministry of Labour. Here, the so-called 'golden triangle', comprising a flexible labour market, a generous unemployment insurance scheme and an active labour market policy, is outlined; however, the term flexicurity was not used. Indeed, it did not come into widespread use as a collective designation for the Danish labour market model until several years later when it became an important part of the Danish vocabulary of labour market policy in 2004 and quickly developed into a term with positive connotations. In other words, flexicurity became a seal of quality for the Danish labour market model in much the same way as the Lur mark once was for Danish butter (Andersen et al., 2007, p. 5).

The flexicurity model (the agreement model and some additional features) has the following characteristics:

- a high level of numerical flexibility as the collective agreements make it easy to lay off personnel (periods of notice are short and there are no compensation requirements for those made redundant); flexible working hours which can be agreed locally; and functional flexibility because trade unions, by and large, take a positive view in terms of breaking down narrow job demarcations;
- the joint venture agreement between the Danish Employers' Confederation and the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions promotes the development and streamlining of enterprises as a shared interest, and the involvement of as many employees as possible in the planning of day-to-day operations;
- the government contributes to flexibility through education and employment policy, among other things. The active labour market policy has the upskilling and reskilling of the labour force, both unemployed and employed, as its objective, thus improving employment opportunities for the unemployed and reducing the risk of redundancy for those already in work;
- the welfare State compensates for the problems which the agreement model either creates or is not equipped to solve. The lack of protection against redundancy is partially compensated for legislatively in the form of unemployment benefits (which are relatively high and lengthy in comparison with other countries, but which are currently being substantially eroded, see below);
- the welfare State supports a high rate of employment (70% of all aged 15-65) via maternity and parental leave as well as public childcare (Knudsen and Lind, 2012, p. 16-17).

Due to the flexicurity model, the Danish labour market is characterised by a high level of mobility compared to other countries. Around 700 000 workers change their job every year. 'Danish wage earners have on average had more jobs in the course of their working lives than their counterparts in every other EU country' (Voss et al., 2009, p. 13).

The Danish flexicurity model created quite a stir in the international arena as a case of good practice until the dawn of the global financial crisis in 2008, since when the term flexicurity has begun to slip into obscurity. The backdrop for the international attention centred on the Danish model was that Denmark, at the time, had the highest employment rates in the EU, the lowest levels of unemployment (2.6% in June 2008 compared to an EU average of 6.8%), and a robust economy which made Denmark appear a role model for the rest of Europe. Another thing which drew international attention was that Denmark had apparently succeeded in combining traits of the Nordic welfare models with traits typical of liberal welfare models such as the Anglo-American (Madsen, 2011).

1.2.4. The flexicurity model and the global financial crisis

The global financial crisis which began in 2008 put the Danish flexicurity model under strain. By May 2011, Denmark had already fallen to ninth place among the EU-27 Member States in terms of unemployment rates. The sharp increase in unemployment reflects an equally drastic fall in employment rates and in domestic product (Madsen, 2011).

In 2012, notice was given of a total of 13 443 redundancies, representing an increase compared with 2011 levels of 11 406 redundancies. The most recent unemployment figures from December 2011 do, however, show a slight fall with, when converted to full-time unemployed equivalency, 6.2% of the labour force affected. Within the public sector, 639 redundancy notices were issued in 2012 compared to 2 848 in 2011 and 3 337 in 2010: a significant fall.

Pedersen (2013), senior analyst for the Economic Council of the Labour Movement (AE, Arbejderbevægelsens Erhvervsråd), points out that Danish employment is primarily dependent on domestic demand with only 25% dependent on export. He underlines that this does not mean that export has no significance for growth and employment, but that the domestic market, i.e., domestic consumption levels, drives the labour market in the short term.

Since summer 2012, the number of enterprises making redundancies has shown a downward trend. With the crisis at its peak, approximately 60 enterprises per month gave notice of redundancies, while this figure in January 2013 was less than 20.

Madsen (2011) concludes that the reaction of the Danish labour market to the crisis was relatively strong compared to most EU-15 Member States (Madsen, 2011). It could be said that the Danish labour market demonstrated its flexibility in the form of mass redundancies within the private sector and increased outsourcing of jobs to countries with low labour costs. But, one might ask, what about the other part of the flexicurity model – the social safety net?

The active labour market policy which constitutes a vital component of the flexicurity model has come under increasing pressure in the wake of the global

financial crisis and has been accused of being both too expensive and too inefficient, while the unemployment insurance scheme has been criticised as too generous (Bredgaard et al., 2011). At the same time, comparatively speaking, Denmark has some of the strictest regulations regarding availability (Bredgaard et al., 2011). The unemployment insurance scheme is a voluntary insurance system which members of unemployment insurance funds pay into and which is administered by the unemployment insurance funds which are placed under the trade unions. The social benefits system, meanwhile, is a government system of income support for people who have not paid into an unemployment insurance fund or who have dropped out of the unemployment insurance system. Today, there are approximately two million people with unemployment insurance; a figure equivalent to roughly two thirds of all salaried workers (Bredgaard et al., 2011).

Further to the structural reform of 2007, the State and municipal components of the job centres were merged as of 1 August 2009 with local authorities assuming full responsibility for job activation. The change was rolled out under the headings 'a unified system' and 'increased employment levels'. The objective was to provide incentives for the activation of the unemployed; however, in summer 2010, the media ran stories suggesting that the unemployed were being sent on meaningless courses with the sole purpose of securing the individual municipalities the maximum share of the available government reimbursement. As a result, funding schemes were altered in order to increase the stimulus for job-oriented activation and for helping the unemployed into mainstream education and training. At the same time, fees for job retraining programmes were increased. The most drastic change in labour market policy, meanwhile, was the shortening of the maximum period of eligibility for unemployment insurance benefits from four years to two (Madsen, 2011) while at the same time strengthening the conditions for re-earning the right to unemployment insurance benefit from 26 weeks to 52 weeks of eligible activity. This change in legislation is currently (February 2013) showing its teeth with 5 000 unemployed falling outside of the unemployment insurance system during January alone. The Ministry of Employment estimates that, within the first half year of 2013, between 17 000 and 23 000 long-term unemployed will lose the right to unemployment benefit (Berlingske Tidende, 6 March 2013).

The Danish trade union movement has protested, taking the view that these changes constitute an attack on the flexicurity model, but these protests have not led to any relaxation of the new regulations. The government has, however, offered to provide the unemployed who 'drop out of the system' so-called 'acute jobs'. The plan is to establish 12 500 acute jobs before July 2013. By January 2013, 3 000 jobs had been created, but this has not prevented 5 000 people

losing their rights to unemployment insurance benefits in the first month of 2013 alone, as already mentioned.

1.2.4.1. *The Danish model – is there still such a thing?*

Knudsen and Lind (2012) respond to this question that, in terms of an agreement model, the answer is 'yes'. In terms of flexicurity, however, there is increasing regimentation of the labour force, due, in part, to the growing unemployment levels and the reduced levels of compensation. In this light, they question whether one can apply the term flexicurity when the security which was originally at the core of the model has seemingly been eroded.

1.2.5. **Adult and further education and training**

Another element in the Danish model concerns government involvement in adult and further education and training. Government funded further and continuing education and training programmes are targeted at both the unemployed, in need of reskilling or maintenance of existing competences, and people in work who can likewise need to refine or update their competences.

As mentioned, the use of education and training as a means of activation has been on the receiving end of criticism. The Chairmanship of the Economic Council, for example, emphasises: Educational activation should be the subject of further targeting and streamlining efforts as the current configuration is expensive, and, historically speaking, it has neither increased employment levels nor income for those being activated. If improvements are not possible then there should be a significant reduction in scope (Det Økonomiske Råd, spring 2007, p. 294; cited in Bredgaard et al., 2011, p. 114).

Instead, they suggest focusing on private job training. Meanwhile, the lion's share of educational activation does not come under the umbrella of what is generally understood by education and training. Data from the Labour Market Commission indicates that almost 60% of the educational and training programmes undertaken in 2007 were of less than seven weeks duration and only around 14% lasted more than six months (Arbejdsmarkedskommissionen, 2008; cited in Bredgaard et al. 2011, p. 114).

1.2.6. **Competence development funds**

The competence development funds – in daily speak the competence funds – were established as a result of a collective agreement among the social partners in industry. The aim of the competence funds is to support workers' participation in competence development and education, with their choice being free. Employees and businesses can apply for grants for courses, training and education in the competence funds. The aim of the funds is also to provide the opportunity to apply for grants to self-directed and self-selected competence

development and create motivation to increase education and training activities. Each employee can spend up to two weeks a year on free courses, education and training, of which they have a free choice, although the range of courses is somewhat constrained. Most of the funds are administrated by kompetencefond.dk. At the website <http://kompetencefonde.dk/>, employees and businesses can see what courses, training and education the competence fund subsidises. It is first and foremost adult vocational training courses (AMU, *Arbejdsmarkedsuddannelserne*), business degree courses and courses that strengthen employees' literacy and numeracy. The courses must be relevant to employees' work and continued competence development. The employee can apply for subsidies related to participation fees, materials to be used in the course, subsidy pay and transport.

The annual contribution to the competence funds per employee varies in the collective agreements from DKK 400 per full-time employees up to DKK 820 in 2013. Employers pay for all full-time and part-time employees with more than nine months seniority who are members of the unions and therefor covered by the collective agreements.

1.2.7. The adult and further education system

Denmark has a longstanding tradition for publicly provided further and continuing education and training. Education and training programmes can be divided in three categories:

- programmes offering formal qualifications;
- programmes not offering formal qualifications;
- private courses

The adult and further education and training programmes offering formal qualifications (VEU) can be split into general and vocational programmes. In the following, we will take a closer look at the latter, comprising:

- adult vocational training programmes (AMU) which include approximately 3 000 different programmes and selected single subject courses from upper secondary level vocational education and training programmes (EUD/IVET). The programmes offer self-contained qualifications and are targeted at both skilled and unskilled workers and at both the unemployed and those in work;
- adult upper secondary vocational education and training programmes (VEUD) which are special adult-oriented courses within mainstream IVET;
- basic adult education (GVU) which is an individually tailored college-based course supplementing previous education and training as well as relevant vocational experience with components from IVET and AMU to offer a full upper secondary vocational education and training qualification;
- the adult higher education system (VFV) which includes further adult education programmes (VVU) as well as programmes at the diploma and

- master levels, offers qualifications corresponding with bachelor's and master's degrees within mainstream education and training;
- open education has the aim of promoting a broad array of vocationally-oriented education and training to the adult population and includes, among other things, part time programmes, single subject courses and specialised courses;
 - programmes not offering formal qualifications; and courses at evening schools, folk high schools and day high schools are among the programmes not offering formal qualifications ⁽⁵⁾.

It is possible for the unemployed to participate in courses while continuing to receive unemployment insurance benefits: for example, participating in a higher preparatory single subject course at an adult education and training centre (VUC), as long as there is less than 20 hours teaching per week. When courses involve 20 hours or more of teaching, this has to be agreed with the unemployment insurance fund.

Figures from Statistics Denmark (2010) show that almost 70% of the employed population typically participate in some form of further education or training during the course of a year. Among the unemployed this figure is 58%, while the figure for those classified as outside the labour force is 24% (Petersen L., 2012). In general, highly educated people have better access to continuous and further education and training. Especially employees in the financial sector and people at management level have a higher participation rate than the rest of the work force.

1.2.7.1. *Adult vocational training (AMU)*

AMU programmes comprise by far the largest component of adult and further education and training. The social partners have a considerable say in the content of the programmes via the 11 trade-specific adult education and continuing training committees which are appointed by the social partners. Together, these 11 committees, for example, for industry, social and healthcare, transport, or construction, cover all the adult vocational training programmes. The committees are tasked with developing programmes which fulfil the labour market's needs for vocationally-oriented adult education and further training for skilled and unskilled workers. Programmes are developed on the basis of analysis of skill needs. In addition, the adult education and continuing training committees are responsible for the development of teaching materials and for the

⁽⁵⁾ Kort om uddannelser til voksne [Adult education and training in brief].
<http://uvm.dk/Uddannelser/Uddannelser-til-voksne/Fakta-om-uddannelser-til-voksne/Kort-om-uddannelser-til-voksne?smarturl404=true>.

trade-specific professional development of teachers. The Ministry for Children and Education has responsibility for: accreditation of programmes, accreditation of public and private institutions as providers, quality inspection, allocation of funds, and establishing the framework conditions for the programmes. The Ministry additionally administers the financial support available to participants as long as they fulfil the stipulated requirements (State grant system for adult training – for further details, see below). The National Council for Adult Education and Continuing Training (VEU-rådet) is appointed by the social partners and has an advisory role to the Minister for Children and Education.

Programmes may be offered at adult vocational training centres, at vocational colleges, or within an enterprise. There are participation fees, generally DKK 120 or 180 per training day for each participant, depending on the course. Exemption from fees is not uncommon; however, participants with a degree-level qualification are charged a higher fee. The unemployed are entitled to a six week adult vocational training course free of charge. Enterprises whose employees participate in an AMU programme while continuing to receive their salaries are eligible for compensation in the form of wage reimbursement corresponding to the highest rate of unemployment benefit. Unsalaries participants can likewise apply for a State grant for adult training corresponding to the highest rate of unemployment benefit. The target group for the programmes is the over-20s, and generally those with a qualification not exceeding upper secondary level vocational training.

The regulations for planning, fees and access in relation to AMU programmes have undergone several changes, brought about by both cutbacks and more stringent accountability requirements.

With regard to access regulations, the previous government, supported by the Danish People's party, introduced a price ceiling for payment of state subsidies for AMU courses – a ceiling which has since been removed by the current government, effective from 1 April 2012, which means the unemployed once again can choose freely among all AMU courses, regardless of cost ⁽⁶⁾.

On the other hand, new regulations, effective from 1 August 2012, mean that wage earners have to be employed for 14 days before becoming eligible for a State grant for adult training. This rule does not apply for certification courses.

The regulations for the outsourcing of AMU courses to private providers without previous AMU accreditation have been tightened as a result of widespread fraud whereby the government has paid out millions to companies for example sending East European workers on month-long AMU courses. Upon completion of these courses, the pledge of a job within the cleaning industry for

⁽⁶⁾ <http://www.fagbladet3f.dk/nyheder/fagligt/c1685d0fe6d84093aa61ae00b2f5e4e8-20120222-forhadet-loft-over-amu-kurser-vaek>

the participants has proven to be false. To close this loophole, external providers are no longer allowed the responsibility of marketing their own courses. At the same time, the outsourced course cannot be conducted in other locations than the provider's address. The contract for outsourcing has been tightened up (Petersen C.G., 2012).

Furthermore, the regulations for individuals with qualifications exceeding the skilled worker level have also been tightened such that these employees, regardless of whether they use their existing qualifications in their work, must pay a higher participation fee than the core target group of skilled and unskilled workers.

The AMU system is funded via the so-called labour market contribution: a tax paid by all wage earners despite AMU not being targeted at the entire labour force, only those with the lowest qualification levels.

In terms of AMU participation rates, there had been initial growth since 2004 (21% for 2004-11) with a minor decline in 2010 and a more drastic decline in 2011 where participation levels fell 31% in comparison with 2010 (from 1 042 180 participants to 715 992). The chairman of the association of AMU heads, Lars Bo Breddam, places the blame on the crisis and cutbacks. In addition to cutbacks within the AMU sector, he points to companies' focus on maximising productivity with as few employees as possible rather than paying attention to education and training. Senior consultant for Danish Industry, Inge Steen Mikkelsen, acknowledges that there has been a steep decline, but considers participation levels in 2010 extremely high and expects figures for 2013 to be normalised (Eriksen, 2012).

Finally, on 5 November 2009, the then government (Venstre and the Conservative People's Party), the Social Democrats, the Danish People's Party and the Danish Social Liberal Party reached an agreement on the use of the reserve allocated to improve adult education and continuing training for the period 2010-12 (*Aftale mellem regeringen ...*, 2009). This agreement refers to an earlier agreement, as part of the Welfare Agreement (2 November 2006), to improve the vocationally-oriented adult education and continuing training system with the allocation of DKK 1 billion in funding. The initiatives were implemented from 2007. The agreement also included an increase in fees for vocational adult education and continuing training. This was implemented in conjunction with 'The follow-up agreement to the globalisation agreement of 1 March 2008'. As a result, the sector went from making a loss to turning a profit. Combined with growing demand, this has led to greater activity in the vocationally-oriented sector.

The agreement to allocate an extra DKK 1 billion to vocationally-oriented adult education and continuing training of early school leavers took place against the backdrop of collective bargaining agreements in the private sector in spring 2007 which contained agreements on competence development. 'With the extra

billion and the significant funds which the social partners agreed to set aside for the area of adult education and continuing training during the collective bargaining negotiations in the spring, there is talk of a massive cash injection' stated Bertel Haarder, then Minister of Education in a press release (12.10.2007, translated from the original Danish) with the headline: 'Significant strengthening of adult education and continuing training'.

1.3. Support structures – opportunity or barrier for learning

This theme is covered in the main report. From the interview material three iconic cases were selected: Mads, Mette and Anna. The three cases were chosen to illustrate the significance of different support structures: see Section 3.1 of the main report.

1.4. Learning for and from radical career change in the labour market

In the analysis of the narrative interviews we discovered that quite a few people have experienced what we call radical changes in their working life. We define radical changes as a change in job which is a shift from one profession to another. In the theme of support structures one iconic case was Mette who wished for and was actively pursuing a (radical) change in her work life through participation in different learning activities. From the interview material we have selected two more iconic cases. In each case the informants tell about radical changes and the difficulties they have experienced. The cases exemplify radical change triggered by stress and severe illness. In both cases meaningfulness and the wish to make a difference has given rise to a new and different perspective on career and mobility in the labour market. For Hans and Tom pursuing 'meaningfulness' is now given a higher priority than before when prestige, high wages and upward mobility were their criteria for success in the labour market.

1.4.1. Stress as a trigger for change

Hans is in his 40s. He is married and is living with his wife and two children. He lives and works in a big city. Hans tells his working life story chronologically, starting with the fact that he worked as a salesman for eight years for three different companies. He has been working since he was 10 years old. Hans' CV is as follows:

- trained in retail;
- works for a while in a warehouse;

- works in customer service;
- drives as a salesman for 4.5 year;
- works a short time, 1.5 month;
- working in an office supply store, where he is key account manager;
- starts working in a company;
- he works in the company for 1.5 year despite nonexistent sale;
- unemployed for six month;
- starts to look for other kinds of jobs – educational/pedagogical;
- got an interview in kindergarten;
- got a new interview at a school. He got the call already in the car on his way home and he got the job.

1.4.1.1. *Trigger for change*

Hans was made redundant from his job as a salesman in 2008 due to the general recession in Denmark. During Hans' period of unemployment, which lasts for six months, Hans' daughter said 'I've got a new father now, totally different from what I have ever had.' which causes Hans to consider the possibility for making a radical change to his work life: '

Hans' daughter meant that in a positive way and that made Hans think about what kind of father he had been for the last heigh years. He then sat down and thought about what to do and which way to go from there and decided that he would like a serious change of job. After talking to his wife Hans decided that he would like to work with children. Hans and his wife have a son, who is autistic, and he felt that he could use these experiences in future jobs.

Hans showed up to a meeting at the union, where he was to indicate what work he would like to do in the future. He replied that he wanted to work with children. He received very positive feedback and afterwards he found out that out of 12 unemployed salesmen in the room that day, only two of them wanted a key account manager job again. Similar to Mette, Hans experienced that there were many people who would like to change and try a new line of business. In the first interview Hans explains that he applied for around 150 jobs, it was uphill, but he also got a positive response in between. Hans finally landed a job in after-school care at a primary school.

In Hans' case the meeting at the union played a positive role and supporting him in his efforts to change his work. This is opposite to the experience Mette had with her union where she experienced that they did not support her efforts. We do not know whether this was due to lack of capability or unwillingness to help the union members change their line of work. Mette suggested that the latter plays a role when members are seeking career guidance and support to change from one profession to another. During the last 10 years unions in Denmark have given higher priority to career guidance. Several unions are marketing the

availability of career guidance as one of the advantages of being in a union. For many years, unions in Denmark have played a pivotal role in relation to supporting their members in pursuing (lifelong) learning opportunities. The unions administer the so-called competence funds which aim to support further education and to broaden their members' professional skills. The funds can be used for a broad range of activities that are specified in the collective agreements. Access to learning has always been high up on the negotiation agenda.

1.4.1.2. *Learning*

About this change in his working life Hans says:

- 'I have changed my work dramatically. From wearing suits, being clean and freshly shaven. To go with jeans, be dirty and unshaven. Ha ha ha!'
- 'it's a whole new world. Before, everything was square and orderly and now you have a lot of freedom. Before the responsibility was counted in dollars and what matters now is children who need help to move on.'
- 'I've had to learn continuously for one and a half years. I started out in a second grade class with a very experienced teacher. I had a hard time finding my role.'

Hans explained about learning in the new job as an assistant to a teacher at the school who was a specialist in pedagogy: 'they have set a very good pedagogue by my side. And in the beginning I walked around like an apprentice and one sees how things work. What has been most difficult is what lies behind. "How is a child doing? good or bad or?" I'm getting better, but yet not good enough.'

Hans also participated in some courses through his work at the school, but mostly courses in what is called the LP model, an educational analytic model on which all staff at the school are expected to base their work.

Hans tells about an activity at his new job that he found especially challenging because it was very different from how he was expected to conduct himself in his previous job in retail. The activity was called a pedagogical day and all the staff are gathered to learn from each other: 'It was a great challenge for me, because we had to interview other people and ask for other people's views and opinions and wasn't allowed to comment ourselves. Previously, I was in control of the agenda which was all about selling stuff, now what matters is to ask the right explorative questions to get other people to open up.'

Hans would like to become a social worker. He considers starting with the assistant education, which he can do as distance learning. He would like to complete the entire education, but considers this would be economically impossible, because the family cannot afford him being on a study allowance.

1.4.1.3. *Stress*

Stress also plays a part in Hans' work life history. After working as an assistant to the teacher at the school who was a specialist in pedagogy for a while Hans had a break down. From his narrative we can see that the shift from trade to pedagogical work is a major shift. For instance Hans was used to working on his own. He would often be alone driving from customer to customer. During his different employments as a salesman there hasn't been much communication between him and his colleagues. In his new job Hans is working with an autistic boy, he explains that he has difficulties handling the shift between being at work or being at home, he thinks a lot about the children at work while he is at home. He explains that he began to stay at home and has difficulties in concentrating. Both Hans' colleagues and his wife notice this and urge him to see the doctor. The Doctor had to check if it was stress or depression, but it was definitely stress related. Hans starts seeing a psychologist.

This case raises the question of whether stress can be related to learning or to the lack of (learning) coping strategies that are needed for certain types of jobs and certainly for working as a pedagogical assistant with boys in need of special care, attention and teaching. The underlying assumption is that learning plays a significant role in relation to stress.

1.4.1.4. *Follow-up*

Hans was interviewed in January 2013. He was still employed as an educator's assistant in a SFO (special education unit) in primary school. However, he had been through a merger between two SFOs and this had been very demanding and had challenged him mentally. He experienced mood swings both at work and at home. He explained his reaction as one against working in an organisation that was too big and too impersonal. There was no longer time for reflection or time for working with an individual child or group of children. He labels it 'pure child care'. At home, his son has started at a continuation school. The son enjoys being away from home, but Hans misses him and has problems handling the fact that his son is growing older. Hans is looking for a new job within special education. This is his pathway, he says.

1.4.2. Illness as a trigger for change

Tom lives in a mid-sized town and has worked in various parts of Denmark. He is currently unemployed. He talks about his wife, Hannah, and his autistic daughter. Regarding his working life, Tom states: 'I haven't had a plan of, what do you want to be? And I haven't ...; I haven't really had a goal in terms of career. Even though it's actually happened for me and I ended up as a project manager and IT manager along the way and what have you.'

Tom was recruited through the local network and interviewed in an office setting. He was very open about his situation and his thoughts about his working life. He also seemed to be looking for meaning and advice and came on as open minded and searching.

Tom recounts his working life history in chronological order, from his school years until his current period of unemployment:

- year 10 (final year of compulsory schooling);
- higher preparatory examination (general upper secondary);
- employed at A (Danish supermarket), responsible for space management;
- employed at B in a city location (manufacture and distribution of cleaning and beauty products) as space management consultant;
- employed at C (Danish supermarket), worked with space management;
- employed at D (Danish supermarket and wholesale), within both sales and IT;
- employed at E (Danish supermarket), within both sales and IT;
- employed by a local firewood supplier where he was a general handyman;
- caretaker and subsequently youth care assistant until the institution went bankrupt.

There have been various reasons behind the transitions during Tom's working life. In his first job, he decided to move on after becoming tired of the job, always being rushed off his feet and working long hours. Once he discovered that not all supermarket executives had the same expectations regarding employee work rates, he began to look for positions elsewhere. Regarding his next position, Tom explains how he was supposed to have been a travelling space management consultant, but it turned out to be a very quiet year with little activity after his boss suffered a coronary thrombosis and subsequently 'used his resources elsewhere'. As a result, Tom received new assignments which did not suit him and he began looking for a new job. In his next position, Tom worked as a travelling space management consultant covering a large district. Consequently, he was away from home a lot. Talking about his years in retail, Tom states:

- 'I've been quite fortunate with that kind of thing, with getting involved with the kind of stuff where it's been pioneer work.'
- 'I think that's what has pushed me on each time. I guess I've actually been pretty good at finding those things which uh, that's something I want to get involved in. Shake things up.'

He also says that, while it may appear as though he has had a lot of transitions, all the chains are related: 'It was part of the family. Whether you worked one place or the other, it was more or less the same thing.'

Tom does not find transitions within the same line of business as problematic. He explains that he has been able to gradually move on and upwards all the time by switching between the different chains which he sees as part of the same family. The more difficult transition began when he fell ill and started to pursue other kinds of work. As the quotes below illustrate it was not very difficult to find a job but new insecurities set in. Insecurities which, at the same time, were related to Tom's illness and to the fact that he was not formally qualified for the new job he had taken.

1.4.2.1. *Trigger for change*

During his working life, Tom has suffered two cancers. He does not provide much detail about the first instance; just that it went well and did not hit him too hard. The second bout was in 2008 and he tells that it did not go too well because they were extremely busy at work and because: 'I had a boss who was incredibly bad at dealing with it.'

Tom was able to return to work for a period where he, to start with, worked two days and took three days off. Subsequently, they wanted to see whether he could work half-time, but Tom says about this: 'It was kind of all or nothing for me, so that didn't work.'

Tom therefore handed in his notice, but they agreed on a severance package whereby he remained in the company's employment for four months but did not actually work. Tom indicates that the illness has had great significance in relation to his future working life. He refers to the cancer as a wake-up call: 'Hey! What the hell is it actually that is important in life?', and as a result he now has other priorities in terms of work and of what he wants to do in the future.

Following his resignation and period of illness, Tom found work with a local firewood supplier where he spent seven months. Among other things, he operated a machine for cutting up the wood. Tom describes this job as somewhat transitional and he therefore looks to move on: 'And when I could, like, feel that now I had more or less got my head sorted out and was back on top of things, someone came along, purely by chance, and said that they'd heard that they were looking for a caretaker and a youth care assistant, half caretaker, half youth care assistant, somewhere or other.'

Tom got the job and, six months later, dropped the caretaker role and functioned entirely as a youth care assistant. He worked there for two years, until February 2012 when the place went bankrupt. Tom is currently mainly applying for positions which involve working with young people because, as he puts it: 'It's been fantastic for me. I mean, the whole thing of working with young people who've had a few problems and who you can help. It's the best job I've had. That's for sure.'

At the time of the first interview, Tom finds himself in a transitional period where he is unemployed but still receiving a salary due to a bankruptcy at the youth institution where he was employed. Tom wants a job which he finds meaningful, where he can make a difference, and he gets that from working with young people. Tom finds it difficult to be unemployed: 'Well, actually the hardest thing about being unemployed is that you don't..., it may well be I'm getting paid and all that kind of stuff, but the moment I start receiving unemployment benefit, there will be a psychological shift; I'll feel like, ok, now being unemployed is a whole different kettle of fish. But it's more the thing of there not being any time frame.'

The lack of a time frame is something that Tom finds difficult in this transition: not knowing when you're going back to work and thereby not knowing how long this transitional phase will last. This feeling of uncertainty and problems with dealing with the unknown future runs across the sample. In the next section on learning from labour market transitions, all three interview persons talk about the difficulties handling not knowing when they will find a new job.

1.4.2.2. *Gaining foothold in the new trade/profession*

Tom describes the change of branch as a strange readjustment process. Despite a 50% salary reduction and waving goodbye to the company car and company phone, Tom still considers it the best decision he ever made.

At the time of the first interview Tom is looking for work as a youth care assistant but finds it difficult because he has no qualifications in this field and only two years of experience. Nevertheless, he expects to find something sooner or later.

On the current job market: 'The problem is that there aren't a lot of jobs around at the moment, not in this field. And the people applying, even though its youth care assistant positions, they're getting applications from qualified youth educators. And that's somewhat of a challenge.'

1.4.2.3. *Learning*

Tom talks a lot about his path into the retail industry and what he terms space management. He quickly received in-company training within space management, which he describes as very much a buzzword at that point in time. This training made it easy for him to find other positions.

While employed in the retail industry, Tom took several courses, including project management training and courses in presentation techniques. He has also spent time making presentations and teaching trainees and retail personnel. Tom has also completed several courses in IT. Looking at the way in which Tom has been able to move onwards and upwards it looks as if it has been possible

because he has constantly an initiator of change, seeking new challenges and being the first to learn new areas.

In his spare time, Tom has both coached a youth football team and has been a scout leader for a group of mentally handicapped children and these are among the competences he is actively using in his job search and which he emphasises in his CV. In relation to his functioning as a football coach Tom has completed several football coaching courses which he has left off his CV (he discovers this during the interview). The interviewer asks what you learn on such courses and it becomes clear to Tom that it is not just technical knowledge about playing football, but also how to motivate 9-12 year-old children, for instance.

In Tom's case it seems relevant to point to the potential of career guidance that could help Tom explore his prior learning experiences and link them to competences asked for in the new line of jobs he is pursuing and even to introduce accreditation of prior learning as a possibility.

Tom would like to study again, some form of pedagogical course, but he considers the financial side of studying while having a family untenable. This Tom has in common with Hans who also points to the financial side of studying, while supporting a family, as a barrier. Denmark has set up a formal system for accreditation of prior learning which would be relevant to consider both in the case of Tom and Hans.

1.4.2.4. *Work/life balance*

Tom does not say much about his home life. We learn that he met his wife back when he first started work at A, and later on he also talks about his daughter, who is autistic. He also makes active use of his daughter's autism in his job applications where he highlights the experience and knowledge it has given him.

Tom explains how it was extremely difficult to keep his work and private lives separate while working in retail. He was online around the clock, could be called in at any time, and he says himself that he prioritised work above his home life and that his working life infiltrated his home life. He is pleased that the two are now properly separated: 'You're more like a person who participates in both contexts, but in completely different ways. When you're at work then you're at work; when you're at home then you're at home. That's something I completely failed to grasp (laughs).'

1.4.2.5. *Support*

For the time being, Tom continues to receive his salary following his redundancy and he is therefore not yet a part of the system. He mentions the possibility of receiving support via the job centre in the future, but he is none too enthusiastic: 'But I'm not too keen on having to go through the job centre and all that, and having to go all the way out there.'

Still on the theme of the job centre, Tom says that 'then they come along with all their tests and all kinds of irrelevant stuff'. As such, he wants to avoid the job centre and find something himself. Tom talks about why he approaches the job centre with such dread and trepidation. His aversion stems from his period of his illness with cancer where he was attached to the job center and had an unfortunate experience at a large group meeting on sickness benefits: 'Then there's a PowerPoint presentation where they explain about being on sickness benefits, which I don't really understand why that applies to me, because I receive a full salary, but yeah, my company gets that refunded, but I had to sit there anyway. And then that PowerPoint finishes up with that, by the way, if you didn't feel unwell, and this is really what it said, then you could go out to the counter and you could tell them you're well again and be registered as unemployed. And then I just sat there and thought: 'You're just taking the piss. Now I've sat and listened to this for 20 minutes, and you finish up with a slide where you actually question whether I'm sick, if that's why I'm out here.' '

Tom adds that, as a result, he is a little perturbed.

Towards the end, the interview takes the form of guidance with the interviewer asking about and making suggestions regarding opportunities for further education and training, etc. Afterwards, Tom indicates that the interview has opened his eyes to new opportunities regarding both education and jobs.

1.4.2.6. *Follow up*

Tom has held three jobs since the first interview. One of the jobs was a permanent position but he quit (again) due to poor working conditions. After that he found another temporary job working with criminal youth, and then the business went bankrupt. He then found work in a boarding school in a temporary position – but fell ill with cancer.

Tom is currently on sick leave with cancer and has been for the last 1½ months. Being sick has been difficult for him and has made it even more difficult to start looking for a job. He does not know when and for how long he will be able to work. The job center has let him be for the moment but he expects them to contact him soon. Tom refers to the meeting at the job centre that ended with a slide where the job centre encouraged people to report that they are not sick anymore. That meeting has set traces. It has been a turbulent time since the first interview. Tom has been able to find jobs that he has been happy with but the illness means that he has not been able to gain a foothold within his new line of business. When Tom is asked what kind of support he could need he says: 'I have been talking to a social case worker at the hospital. It was the hospital's suggestion. Then you can talk to someone who has no interests and no moneybox. It is really difficult to be in this situation.'

The medicine he takes has side effects and he is not able to hold down a fulltime job. The job he had required long working hours (often in the evening) so it was difficult for him to get time with his family whose support Tom needed while fighting the cancer. He talked to the social worker about finding part time work. Tom told the social worker that he would really like to work but that he cannot endure too long hours right now. But no workplace says: 'just come five hours a day and do what you can.' Tom talks about the possibility of getting a flex-job. To be considered for such a job he would need to be declared 50% invalid, which means taking part in a trial period work assessment to test manageable work levels. (*arbejdsprøvning*). If he has to go through that he will do it.

Up until now he has not been able to work, but work means a lot to Tom. He says he should have changed his line of business many years ago. He has not talked to the social worker about taking an education. Economically it has been hard since the first interview – another bankrupt workplace, different jobs and so on. Tom talks about a psychological shift and uncertainty in relation to these changes.

It is important for Tom to take good care of himself. He can't bare thinking that this would be his last work. He needs contact with other people and to get away from home. He would take any job that could help him be in contact with other people and get away from home – delivering mail for instance.

But right now, the most important thing is peace and quiet for Tom. Later he will get an answer as to how his cancer is responding to treatment. He feels that his life is on standby. The waiting time is tedious and hard. If he gets positive feedback he will start thinking about working again. He hates the vacuum. He wants to stay active and it helps to do so. He still coaches football and will continue to do so. He thinks it will help him to work but he is not able to.

To gain a foothold in his new line of business Tom needs to think about how to tell a future employer about his situation. His employer would have to accept that he needs to go to the hospital for regular check-ups.

1.4.3. Summary

To sum up on the theme 'learning for and from radical changes in the labour market' and the presentation of two iconic cases, Hans and Tom made transitions from one line of business, in respectively sale and retail, to working with children and youth as assistant pedagogue and youth care assistant we highlight the following points for discussion.

It is more a question of learning from the transitions than it is a question of learning for the transition. In these cases there has been little planning of the transitions, they have been spurred by life events. Therefore learning has been a matter of learning on and from the (new) job. Not a matter of learning to qualify for the job.

There has been very little – next to none – career guidance or advice made available to Hans and Tom. In the first theme about support structures we used the term potential points of contact. We see similar potential points of contact for career guidance in these iconic cases.

1.4.3.1. *Downward mobility*

Central to the cases of Hans and Tom, is that they experience radical changes in their careers which mean they experience downward mobility ⁽⁷⁾ and earn a lower salary. They change from skilled to less skilled jobs. As the education benefits are directed towards the unskilled, Hans and Tom would both have difficulties getting a share of the education benefits. The Danish government passed a law on accreditation of prior learning stating the everybody is entitled to have their prior learning, non-formal, informal and formal assessed and accredited.

People such as Tom or Hans are trapped in the system, they want to pursue a radical change in their work, but they are not the target group for adult guidance, they are not the target group for accreditation of prior learning, they are often not entitled to receive study benefits because they are not in a permanent position, they want to change profession and cannot access education and training through their unions and they are considered to be skilled already. Therefore they end up doing less skilled work, having difficulties gaining a foothold, being the first one to be made redundant in times of crises and having poor access to formal learning activities. Another possibility for obtaining funding for education as an adult is revalidation which is used very differently across the municipalities. You are entitled to revalidation if you, due to illness, are unlikely to be able to perform the job for which you were educated.

In the next section, we have another example of radical change and downward mobility and it has implications for the individual and the social community of which he is a part. However, compared to Hans and Tom, Erik is strategically going for the change, having used his gardening leave as a period for reflection and personal development.

1.5. Learning from labour market transitions

In this section, we will look into how labour market transitions spark off a learning process. Through three iconic cases, the focus is on how the interviewees have experienced being dismissed and put on gardening leave and how they narrate

⁽⁷⁾ Although it may be necessary to problematise this term, because it depends on the perspective taken by the person. The move may only be downward in a formal economic sense, as an individual may regard it as a new opportunity to develop under-used skills, for instance.

the transition as a learning process. The interviewees have in common that they received full salary during six months and hereby had the opportunity to reflect on their careers and how they would like to see them develop. The three cases chosen represent:

- radical career change (see also the previous section);
- change in work-life balance;
- continuation of career.

The section is based on the follow-up interviews where the interviewees were asked to describe their experiences during the gardening leave and reflect on what they learnt during this period. The cases touch upon the same two themes as the previous sections: that is, support structures and change, but added to these are the themes of learning and the learning processes made possible during a transition. This section points to the learning potential of transitions in contrast to the political idea of transitions as something to be controlled and minimised.

1.5.1. From executive director to green keeper

When Erik was first interviewed, he was in the middle of a crisis where he was uncertain as to the direction that his working-life should take. He has a background where he has worked his way from shipping trainee to executive manager in an international company with strong traditions and identity. He has suffered from severe stress as a consequence of a major merger between two companies and was at the time of interview still highly affected by this stressful situation. He was fired due to a reorganisation and was challenged in all aspects of his life at the time of the first interview.

Financially, he has to reconsider the economy of the family. They live in one of the most affluent and expensive areas in the country: 'One of the hardest things, that's the economic, the money that's missing. I haven't been hit hard, as I have a wife who earns, she also works for the Company, and earns a lot. So we're ok, although I earn nothing compared to previously. Together we're ok. But we cannot afford the big expensive things anymore.'

Socially, it is a kind of 'déroute' (crushing defeat) as there is a lot of prestige connected to being an executive manager and working for this specific company. Existentially, Erik has to confront himself and his values and reflect on who he is and what he wants to be. During the interview, he talks about becoming a green keeper but has serious doubts: 'Is it because I think it would be awesome to be a green keeper? Or is it because I hereby avoid some of the things that I fear by working in an office and being a leader or all the tasks connected to this, because I'm ..., I don't know.'

When Erik was re-interviewed seven months later, he had taken a decision which is radical in terms of his working-life: he had started in the vocational

programme for green keepers and had also managed to find an apprenticeship through his extensive network. The interview evolved around his decision and what it had taken him to go from uncertainty to a radical change of career.

1.5.1.1. *The role of support structures in transitions*

The support of others had a catalytic effect in the case of Erik. Especially the conversations with a close friend were narrated as having helped Erik to reach a decision. When analysing Erik's narrative on the support that he drew on during his transition, it can (tentatively) be categorised as comprising civil society, market and state:

(a) Civil society

The radical change that Erik has made has been with the support of a good friend. Erik describes how he has discussed his situation with this friend and that he has been able to give him the feedback necessary for Erik to reflect on his situation and have new perspectives to work from: 'I have a really, really good friend. He's also the one who has provided me with the contacts [to the golf clubs]. He is the most fantastic person to sit down with and have a conversation, so that you find clarity about your situation and what you think. He gives you a friendly kick, so you turn things around.'

Like Mette, Erik emphasised that dialogue is one of the most important factors in taking a radical decision and he continued: 'If you don't have such a friend, then buy a session with a coach, who is good at it.'

This is also something which runs across the sample: the open dialogue in which somebody actively listens and takes on the role of a critical friend.

(b) Market

As part of his gardening leave, Erik's previous employer bought an outsourcing package at AS3, where Erik had the right to six sessions (*tjek*). When Erik was interviewed the first time, he did not have the mental resources to use the support provided by AS3: 'I was offered an AS3 scheme with placement and outplacement service and I started, but I couldn't really go on with it. I didn't really know what to do and couldn't find out what I wanted to do and so on. Basically, I had a good time being at home, but the insecurity about what the hell should happen to me afterward, weighed heavily so ..., I couldn't really enjoy it as I liked, like you enjoy a holiday for a month knowing that you have something to return to.'

'I got a briefcase where I had to write what my mission and life goals were, and I had to get back to work again, great – that was awesome. I sat at home, I sat in the living room and looked at the papers, and suddenly I started crying. I just sat there and my eyes filled with tears. My wife sat on the sofa and asked, 'What's wrong?' 'I don't know. I simply cannot contain it. If I start containing it, I start crying'. I couldn't.'

Erik's narrative points to the fact that counselling/coaching cannot be standardised and delivered as a 'bulk' commodity. It has to be adapted to the individual client and take his/her life situation into account. In Erik's case, the coaching sessions were put on standby for a period until Erik was emotionally ready to start working on his career plans. In the second interview the AS3 support was narrated as central to his decision-making: 'I worked with AS3 about this [decision]. To get the greater perspective: what do you want to do with your working-life? I tried to make a journey: I stand before the day of retirement and look back upon the past 20 years, which are those that I have to define. When you see those years, what do you see? What has been fantastic? Why have you been happy for those 20 years? What have you done where you thought, wow, this is just fun and great?'

In this exercise, the aim is to identify Erik's values and make him gain a sense of his 'intrinsic' motivation. The exercise led to a list of 28 points in which Erik defined a 'good' working-life. The list included items such as good management, good colleagues, motivation, work-life balance and specific items such as working outdoors, having a well-defined working day. In the exercise, Erik reflected on his experiences from his former job and how he had been available 24/7 and decided that he wanted more balance in his life. During the interview, Erik was asked to reflect on his decision-making process and he said that he had not been ready to go into this process at the beginning, but as he got better, he had the energy to start working with the coach and go into a more strategic rational coaching process [important point]. AS3 also adapted the coaching to his needs and supported him in the process towards making this radical change happen.

(c) State

Finally, Erik talks about his encounter with semi-public support at his union (semi-public as the union is under the legislation on unemployment and has to inform their members of the rules). This reflection was brought around by a question concerning the role of dialogue and the need for symmetry between the participants in the dialogue. About the interview (in Danish: *samtale* which has different connotations than interview. To *samtale* means to talk together) at the union, Erik says: 'When I was fired and applied for unemployment benefit, I needed to go to an interview. At first I thought, 'great'. As an introduction, a two hour presentation was held about practical stuff and legislation. It was ok. And then we had this interview and I thought, that's great, I look forward to it. I'm going to have a good dialogue with this guy about the future. How I see it and my possibilities. And then I came up to a young guy, who definitely didn't have any management or personal experience. He was standing at a counter. 'You have to apply for this and

this many jobs!' Well, listen, I'm looking into the possibility of becoming a green keeper and of course it's difficult [...] 'That's not enough. You have to apply for other jobs'. Well, fine, but my goal is to become a green keeper. 'But the rules are like this: you have to apply for at least four jobs and then you have to apply for something else'. Ok, see you.'

The impression that Erik is left with is that the interview was solely about control and had nothing to do with guiding him in his efforts to change career. The experiences with the unemployment system are in most of the narratives quite negative (see Hans, Mette and Anna). Erik feels that the message conveyed is that it is close to impossible to make such a radical change as he is about to do.

In Denmark unemployed people have to meet several requirements to receive unemployment benefit:

- (i) they have to register that they are available in the labour market once a week. If they forget the unemployment benefit will be suspended/confiscated;
- (ii) they have to apply for four jobs every week and depending on the union the applications have to be uploaded or a list of applications has to be filled in. The number of applications was lowered in 2012 due to criticism from both employers and unemployed people;
- (iii) they have to attend several meetings at the job centre or in the case of people with an academic background at an external provider of employment services. As with the registration, absence without legal grounds will lead to the suspension of unemployment benefits. In the narratives, the role of the PES seems to be concentrated around making people abide by these rules and less on supporting the unemployed.

1.5.1.2. *Learning from transition*

Erik pointed to three factors in terms of a successful transition: time, money and network. Making a radical decision such as he has done takes time. Erik had six months of full salary and a wife in a high salaried position, and he was therefore not under immediate pressure pushing him into a hasty decision. Finally, Erik's personal network was important. He pointed to his close friends and to his wife as important people who have supported him in the decision-making. The metaphor that Erik is using during the interview is the metaphor of travelling: a personal journey.

1.5.1.3. *Reflections on change*

When Erik reflected on change and the barriers to taking a radical decision in terms of his working-life, he talked about the reactions from the surroundings.

Basically, he described two types of reactions, the supportive and the non-supportive.

As to the non-supportive, there seems to be a certain level of conservatism among people. Expectations are that Erik either should stick to what he has been doing not to waste his potential or that he will not be able to fit into a job at a lower level of the echelon.

When Erik applied for an apprenticeship he met different attitudes among the golf clubs that he contacted: 'Some said directly that I was too old. Others thought, that here's somebody who has quit his job. A big boss in a big company. He has been a leader of many people. He will not fit in. It won't last' or 'he will take over my job'. I'm green keeper now and he'll push me out'. Others said, 'that's great! Fantastic that you have managed to do this. I did it myself many years ago when I [...]'.

As to the supportive, Erik seemed to spark off reflections in other people where they started reflecting on their careers and what they really want to do. There seems to be a general feeling of being caught up in a career. This may reflect the fact that many of the interviewees are in their mid-lives.

Erik's narrative about the labour market was one about a certain level of rigidity. Downwards vertical mobility is not easy and a major shift in mid-age is likewise perceived as problematic, also by Erik himself. He talks about social segregation, that he does not have any friends who have a vocational background and that he feels that the attitude towards him has changed since he made the shift from top management to green keeper. He is aware that this is an attitude that he has himself. A radical career change affects not only the person himself, but his role in his social network and the relations within the social network.

1.5.2. Finding work-life balance

Katrine was in a similar position to Erik's, but her way of handling it was different. She seemed to be more clarified about her situation and what kind of changes she wanted to see in her working-life. Her background was to some extent also similar to Erik's. She had climbed the hierarchical ladder from IT assistant to Head of the IT administration in a Ministry. She was made redundant as part of a general 10% downsizing of the public sector. However, whereas Erik made a radical change in his working-life, Katrine focused on work-life balance and on how to promote specific values in her life: 'That's something else that this reflection has given me – that I don't want to go back to that. I want a balanced life, and of course I want to work, I enjoy working, but it's not going to take all my time. So there's also that balance. That I want to make an effort, I want to leave my mark like I've said the whole time, but I also want to leave my mark in other areas. While previously, perhaps even last year, if we use that as the turning

point, I would have said I'm going to leave my mark on the job, you know? So that's also the major difference since this redundancy.'

In the second interview, Katrine continued this narrative and narrated her decision to go for a job as middle manager as an informed choice. She had reduced her weekly working hours from 60 to 40 and made space for travelling. She described her decision as a compromise between her need for security, which she finds in her competences within IT, and the need for making a difference, which she pursues through humanitarian work.

1.5.2.1. *The role of support structures in transitions*

Katrine had a wide range of opportunities for support during her gardening leave, in fact almost 'too many' she concluded. Whereas Erik considered the support he received from his friend as the most important, Katrine did not mention anything about support from family or friends. Instead, the offers provided by the market in the form of coaching and mindfulness are central to her transition.

Market

Katrine received support from AS3 and two personal coaches, one (Cecilie) of which she had met on a mindfulness course and the other (Anne) as a management coach during her employment in the ministry. When comparing the offers, the coaching sessions with Anne were the most helpful. Katrine had three sessions with Anne who helped her to become more aware of her wants and her needs. Anne encouraged Katrine to see her gardening leave as an opportunity, regardless of how traumatic Katrine perceived being dismissed after 19 years in the labour market. Anne made Katrine reflect on her needs and objectives. An exercise which is central in Katrine's decision-making is the same as described by Erik: 'what kind of life narrative would I like to look back on the day I die? What would I like to have experienced? I worked with these more philosophical questions during my gardening leave. What I learnt was that my work should not be so dominating. I wanted something else into my life that could trigger me.'

Katrine's case shows the usability of narrative approaches in guidance.

The support provided by AS3 was more focused on writing CVs and cultivating her social network and Katrine thinks that she was quite capable of this without any help. However, AS3 proved helpful in the sense that the AS3 coach also worked in a project for ethnic youth and was able to support Katrine in her efforts to do humanitarian work. She established the contact between Katrine and a mentee. In this sense, the coach brought meaningfulness into the AS3 course but as a side-effect.

Finally, Katrine had contact with the leader of the mindfulness course who had become an acquaintance (in-between the sphere of my professional and private life). Cecilie helped her through conversations where she reminded

Katrine about being mindful in the transition and create an awareness of herself and her needs.

1.5.2.2. *Learning from transition*

The gardening leave provided Katrine with the possibility to evaluate her working-life and 'do some soul-searching'. She was able to assess her values and realised that some of them were no longer so important for her: prestige, influence/power, position (see also the section on radical change). She made a decision to change her working life – in a less radical way than Erik – but still to work for a better work-life balance although it meant that she had to go down the hierarchical ladder to middle management.

Katrine has also become more aware of her professional network and to nurture this network. As she says: 'you never know when such a transition period might come back'. Linked-In is mentioned as an important way to keep your network updated.

Katrine uses the metaphor of 'comfort zone' to explain the changes that have taken place during her transition. She has been forced to step out of her comfort zone and test her values and competences.

1.5.2.3. *Reflections on change*

The reactions from her surroundings have been quite positive: 'people have been positive, professionally and personally. The reactions are often related to the personal level, where people say, 'great that you had the courage to do this!' The fact that I have stepped out of a career, out of a stressful life. [...]'.

Like Erik's narrative, there seems to be a general longing among people for changing their life into another direction. Katrine narrates the gardening leave as a 'unique opportunity' and points to the fact that she had the financial room to turn the transition into something positive: 'had I had three months of termination of my contract and had two children, husband and a house, which I couldn't pay if I didn't get a job within three months, then I think my focus had been completely different. Then it is a question of your monthly pay check. But [coaching] as a supplement could work to turn the situation into something positive: you have a chance not to go by routine but to have a sense of your gut feeling. I definitely think that coaching could be a good offer [to unemployed people].'

If we compare the support structures that Katrine has drawn on, they are markedly different from the support structures described by Anna who has been activated by the job centre. To turn focus from the writing of CVs and to the intrinsic motivation of the unemployed might prove valuable.

1.5.3. Continuation of career and yet!

In the first interview, Bente is trying to come to grips with the situation of losing her job. She had been employed in the same company for 25 years and had never been unemployed. She finds the situation troublesome and is focused on finding a new job as quickly as possible. Compared to Erik and Katrine, Bente does not reflect about making a radical change in her career pathway. Her dream job is one similar to the one she has had for 25 years. She has a strong identity as a translator, but still she is ready to take whatever job that she is offered and describes in the first interview her strategies for finding a job before her gardening leave ends.

In relation to applying for jobs below her qualification level, she describes this strategy as problematic as she is competing with many applicants and may be considered over qualified by the employers: 'you cannot use a standard application, and I know, but I can feel that in terms of some of the jobs I'm applying for, I am sorry for using this expression, applying downwards, because there are no translator jobs – you know, people with knowledge of communication and languages are being dismissed when there's a crisis, right, and I can do many administrative things, office work and the like, so it is quite natural for me to apply for a job as secretary, and then I experience that we are many applicants. A position I applied for had 900 applicants, right [...].'

However, in relation to applying for jobs at her qualification level, Bente highlights how this is also difficult, as many translator jobs are being outsourced by companies. Hence she would need to become self-employed/freelancer in translation but she is not whole-heartedly following this strategy as being part of a collegial group is important for her: 'my mother-in-law says, 'well, if you have to sit at home, you might as well sit and translate'. But I have found out that I want to have colleagues. I want to have sparring partners and I also think that by sitting at home, I have found out that [freelancing] is not me.'

Applying for jobs in teaching where she can draw on her qualifications could be another possible avenue, but she does not have the necessary teaching qualification. She says: 'I wrote to AOF and HOF [liberal education organisations] [...]. I called and then I asked – teaching, right. And if I had some ideas [...] And then I wrote that I would like to become a teacher and they probably already knew what they needed, but if they needed one, I would be ready, and I had some ideas – now I'm a fan of Jane Austen and I could plan a course in this, no problem, or in commercial writing.'

In the second interview, Bente is encouraged to reflect on her transition period as she was then employed as a translator in a law firm.

1.5.3.1. *The role of support structures*

Similar to Erik and Katrine, Bente was offered an outplacement package at AS3. However central to her narrative is the close dialogue that she has with her husband during the transition.

Civil society

In both interviews, Bente's husband has a central role as sparring partner on her applications and CV. He is as concerned as she is with her situation as it is not solely her problem but a problem for both of them: '[...] he was just as concerned as I was. One thing is that you for many years talk about the risk of one of us being unemployed and that we could handle this. It is this insecurity that you feel. So he was strongly affected by the fact that his wife was unemployed. He thought, 'now I have to hold on to my job'. We are both addicted to feeling secure. He is employed in the public sector and can lose his job if a restructuring takes place. So he is vulnerable too.'

The unemployment situation reaches into the life situation of the family and Bente and her husband work together for Bente to find a job. Her husband comments on her applications and coaches her: 'I started out making a CV with the aid of the outplacement. Brief and concise and no longer than three pages. And my husband said, 'but you also know this and this. Nobody will understand what competences you have. What about all the other stuff you've done'. And he has coached me. You need to have somebody to talk to. We [sic!] went from a chronological CV to a thematic CV.'

The dialogue with her husband is narrated as central in her efforts to find a job.

Market

Bente was offered an outplacement package by her previous firm and she has six coaching sessions of a duration of 1.5 hour. During the coaching sessions, the coach focuses on helping Bente with mapping her competences for Bente to create a CV which encompasses her competences. Bente also says that the coach helps her to boost her self-confidence: 'Of course this coach in AS3 she sits there and says, 'well, what can you do? And then, fantastic you're also able to do this'. It's probably a psychological thing that they have to do to make you feel good.'

Bente is also coached on how to present herself at a job interview: 'next time, I had to prepare a presentation of myself. And then I said something which was too colourful. 'You have to say, I, I, I'. That was one of the things I learnt. To focus on myself. Not say we, say 'I' '. [Although interestingly Bente still uses the neutral 'man' or the plural 'we' during the interview].

Compared to Erik and Katrine, the AS3 sessions have, in Bente's case, been addressing the practical aspects of her job search. She does not talk about more existential reflections on her situation or coaching related to possible career changes.

State

Officially, Bente is only unemployed for a month. It was a situation that she dreaded in the first interview. I ask her in the second interview if her expectations were met: 'I had hoped that I would get a job before. You have to ..., it's full-time employment in being unemployed. You have to register and write and follow-up. Fill in and not fill in and remember a lot of deadlines. Well, it's oh...; I'm not good at it. That you ..., that somebody has to decide over you in this way'.

In Denmark, a public debate has been whether unemployed people take advantage of the Danish social security system. In this debate, one case was used to illustrate how unemployed persons are basically not interested in taking available jobs. This person, Robert, has become an iconic case and referred to as 'Lazy Robert'. I ask Bente about her opinion of Robert: 'I was only unemployed for one month. But in my own eyes I was unemployed [for the whole period of gardening leave]. And you wouldn't wanna be compared to him. It was so annoying. Somehow it becomes personal what goes on in the media and it is not constructive in any way.'

Later when talking about the bureaucratic measures set up for unemployed people, she says: 'Somehow you understand it. We don't want any Lazy Roberts. But there are so many of us [unemployed]. And nobody reaches out for us. You are just a number in the line.'

Bente narrates the system as bureaucratic and with a strong focus on controlling the unemployed to avoid free riders in the system. She is not offered any support as unemployed person as she says: 'Maybe I got registered as somebody who could manage on my own.'

1.5.3.2. Learning from transition

Bente perceives her gardening leave as a period where she has learnt about herself. The transition is narrated as a rupture and a transformative learning experience. She says: 'Now I'm in a job and I can sit and think, 'well, it was a good and educating period'. But that's only because I'm in a job. If I hadn't had a job, I would have pulled my hair out and been totally frustrated.'

In terms of her search strategies, Bente evaluates these in terms of learning and reflects on the differences involved in applying for different types of work. So, for example, applying for jobs below her qualification level proved to be difficult. The fact that she had an academic degree was by some employers perceived as a disadvantage: 'I applied for clerical jobs and called. Generally, I called for

information on most jobs before I applied for them to learn about the job and to introduce myself. Often I was told that I should apply as I had an interesting profile, but I also had other reactions during the conversation, 'But you have an academic background. Then we don't want to employ you because you don't wanna be here'. And then I thought, well, if I want to change to something entirely different, then I won't have a chance. So sometimes I didn't send my application as I knew that it wouldn't be selected due to the fact I have an academic background.'

Applying for jobs at her qualification level involved a different type of challenge. In the first interview, Bente said that jobs as a translator were generally difficult to find. However, in terms of the job that she found she says: 'I had the right profile for this job. It is difficult to change. Now I got this and this is great. But it has been frustrating to experience that you cannot change and do something else.'

Being self-employed/freelancer in translation was also an option which presented itself to Bente. She had a former colleague who called her to ask her to do some freelance work for him. But during the transition Bente realised that she was not interested in working from home and having no close colleagues: 'I also learnt that I shouldn't have my own small company at home. I wanted to go out and have some colleagues.'

Applying for jobs in teaching was another strategy that Bente pursued and was actually partly successful in doing. She made a proposal for a course in written English for a liberal education association. However, there were not enough participants. She also applied for a job as English teacher at a commercial college so she did contemplate making a career change during her transition: 'It's not because I didn't apply. But again there were many others who applied and who had the right background. I didn't have a teacher qualification. I called on a job in Hillerød and had it been successful I would have been qualified on a continuing basis. But there were 200 applications, so they didn't consider my application.'

In terms of her strategy to find a new job, Bente applied for jobs within, below and outside of her profession. She found that it was difficult to change career pathway. This may reflect the fact that in times of crisis, the labour market is a 'buyers' market' and the employers can pick among many applications. In the case of Erik, he used his network to find an apprenticeship.

1.5.3.3. *Reflections on change*

Bente does not change her career pathway during her gardening leave but still she goes through a process of personal development where she has to discover what her skills are and what she can offer in a labour market where jobs are

scarce. She discovers – among other things – that she is resilient and has a capacity to learn new things quickly.

She narrates the transition as a process of personal development where she has had to ‘re-invent herself’ and learn ‘how to sell yourself’. She does not use a specific metaphor to describe the transition but draws on the languages of self-development and marketisation.

1.5.4. Summary

In all three cases, unemployment is a trigger for a process of development and change. The situation that the interviewees involuntarily are placed gives rise to reflection and action. In terms of learning, the interviewees are emotionally strongly affected by the situation and have to learn how to cope with a new life situation.

In terms of support, an external provider of outplacement service, AS3, has been providing coaching. The experiences with AS3 vary across the cases. Erik experienced a coach who adapted the service to his specific needs. Katrine had a coach who could help her with her ideas of doing humanitarian work, while Bente received practical advice on applications, CV and job interviews. The coaches employed by AS3 are employed on a freelance basis and matched with the clients on the basis of the clients’ background and sectoral experience. So although, AS3 has a common approach to the outplacement dealing with the various phases that a dismissed person goes through, in practice the coaching is adapted to the individual client. The support provided by AS3 is perceived as helpful due to the adaptation to individual needs.

In the iconic cases of Erik and Bente, the support from family and friends makes the major difference. Erik is supported by a friend who asks him the relevant and critical questions during long walks, while Bente’s husband helps her in her search for a new job. They both emphasise the importance of dialogue and the role of somebody who actively listens. This is also the case of Katrine, although she has made use of professional coaching through a coaching firm. Katrine recommends coaching as part of the support of unemployed people.

As to the public/semi-public system, none of the interviewees has any experiences that supported them during their transition. In the case of Erik, he narrates one incident where what he thought was to be a dialogue was in fact an information meeting telling Erik about his obligations as someone who was unemployed. Bente’s overall narrative is characterised by ambiguity. She understands that the system has to control that there are no free riders, but she also feels that the system is overly bureaucratic and controlling. The unemployment system has been heavily criticised due to several rigid requirements which the unemployment fund had to control.

The transition is in the case of Erik and Katrine used as an opportunity to reflect on their careers so far and how they would like their careers to develop in their last 20 years in the labour market. Both use a method of retrospection i.e. looking back on their working life on the day they retire/die. This method makes it clear to Erik that something radical has to change in his working life (another trigger is the fact that his son is involved in a serious car accident). To Katrine it is a matter of work-life balance.

A theme which cuts across all three cases is the difficulty of career change. They describe various barriers: personal, social and structural. At personal level, career change challenges the identity and requires will power, resilience and capital (social and economic). Socially, a career change also generates challenge arising from the change in surroundings. In the case of Erik, his radical career change also changes his place in the social community. Work identity is strong in the Danish context and the move from executive director to green keeper gives rise to different attitudes and reactions. Bente's situation is also a situation which affects her family and creates a feeling of insecurity. Structurally, the cases of Erik and Bente show that both the labour market and the unemployment system have difficulties handling career changes. It is difficult to leave a trajectory once established. It demands a high level of determination in the person making the shift, along with support from the family and nearest friends.

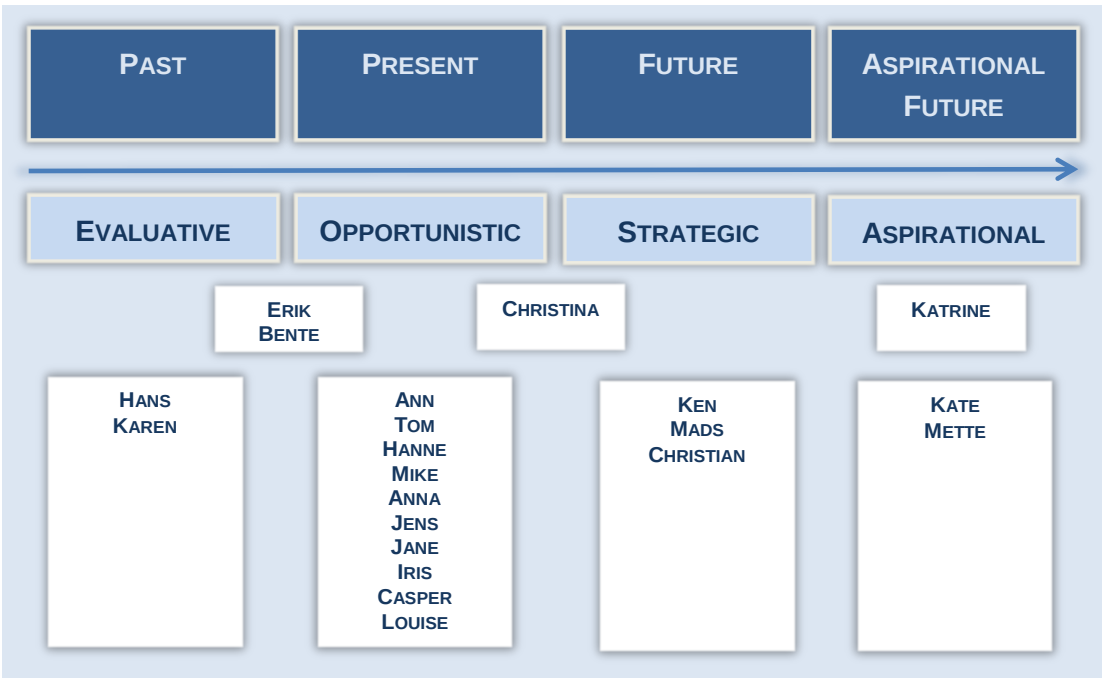
Transitions can be seen as providing opportunities for change. During transitions the interviewees had the possibility of change and for learning. Transitions can involve for individuals a rupture with their previous careers. Support structures have to support learning in terms of the cognitive, the emotional/affective and the social.

1.6. Career decision-making styles

In the summaries drawn up on the basis of the narrative interviews, we attempted to categorise the interviewees' career decision-making style. This categorisation was tentative but still adds to a picture of career decision-making which is overwhelmingly opportunistic. If we see the four styles from a temporal aspect, most interview persons relate to the present and the opportunities at hand.

If we look into the narratives of those who are in a transition between jobs it is striking how in this process they, with the help of others (professional coaches and family), draw on other career decision-making styles. Erik is an iconic example as he goes through the stages of non-coping through the evaluative (what has working life been so far) to the aspirational (and what would I like it to be according to my aspirations), to the strategic (how can I get there) to the opportunistic (what are then the possibilities in my network and in the education

system to make it real). In this sense, this is not only decision-making typologies but career guidance methodologies that can support a transition. The stages described here correspond to the prescribed stages in career guidance in many theories (e.g. Peavy, 1997).



Comparing Erik's narrative to that of Anna, she also stands out as an iconic case. Anna is in another situation in terms of social network and financial situation. The activation schemes offered by the job center focused narrowly on practical aspects of writing a CV and performing at a job interview. There is no focus on Anna's competences, her needs and wants (as Katrine puts it when talking about coaching) nor on any strategies for moving Anna from unemployment to employment. On the basis of the narrative interview, Anna does seem to have resources for a career change. However, she is focusing narrowly on barriers and has no idea of her actual space of possibilities. The schemes offered by the job center are not supporting Anna in making her transition a transition, but seem to leave her in a defensive position where a job in a supermarket is perceived as the last resort. Anna's narrative is not the only one pointing in this direction; Mike and Mette have the same view on the job centers and their activation schemes. Mette says in the interview about the job centers: 'Yes, but I just think that they (PES) are not even taking the time to sit down and really listen to people. And it has lacked every time I've been there. They are more focused on getting people quickly through the system. Out of their office, yes; not out of unemployment, as such, of course. Somehow I can understand them, because the more people they get back to work, the less they

get to do. That is, if they have less work to do, so they will also be fewer. They would close themselves down. So I understand, but it's just not good practice. I think it's a shame there are so many good resources in people we need to listen to what they want. And many of them, they are geared to do something different than what they're doing. Through an interview you could find out. You don't get anything from answering questions on a piece of paper, because the only thing you have to answer is what computer programs you know and for how many years have you been doing Excel. It gets you no wiser people ..., I didn't know what I wanted to do ..., I could not put a title on ..., I think the people who sit on the other side of the table should be professional enough to come up with ideas on what it could be. Just like my expectations to the career counsellors in the schools. They should be able to come up with good ideas, well, what do you want to be when you grow up? (Laughs). And I think it is a real shame because I really think that they (PES) miss being able to get people out in some amazing jobs that they would love wildly.'

Mette points to the need for career counsellors to support opening up the space of possibility for the individual and helping her through the stages of finding out 'what you can do', 'what you want to do', 'how you can do this' and 'what are the possibilities'. She points to the professionalisation of the career counsellors in the job centers and from the narratives, we would point to the need to separate career counselling and the control functions laid down in the legislation on unemployment benefits. The fusion of the two leads to a double role of the career counsellor and adds ambivalence to the relationship between counsellor and counselled.

1.7. Transversal themes

The data in this project are rich and provide the basis for many perspectives on career and labour market transitions. In the Danish report, we have chosen to go into three themes which are central to the project. In this section, we will trail the narratives into the wider societal contexts and see how they are linked with policies and institutional settings in the Danish context. Furthermore, we will outline several key issues which we would suggest are further explored theoretically and empirically.

1.7.1. Flexicurity – flexibility but less security

The flexicurity system is, in many ways, represented in the narratives of the interviewees. Transitions are perceived as part of a working life and are not problematised in terms of changing from one company to another. To the interviewees it is natural to change jobs and be mobile, which is also reflected in the fact that around 700 000 employees, approximately one third of the labour

force, is mobile every year. Consequently self-initiated transitions from one job to another are not problematised, especially not if they are within the same sector. Sectoral or trade shifts are problematised by the interviewees. There seems to be many factors that reinforce a linear career pathway: societal values, social structures and national policies. It seems from the narratives to be easy to move within the same sectors and trades/professions within which one has experience and is already qualified, while it is much more difficult to acquire new competences and move across sectors and trades. In this sense, there seems to be a certain degree of conservatism in the flexicurity system, some collective agreements and the PES which makes it difficult for many individuals to change career pathway.

As for the security component of the flexicurity model, this is currently being eroded. Recent legislation has, as described in the section on the labour market context, reduced the maximum period of eligibility for unemployment benefits and strengthened the conditions for re-earning the rights. These changes are reflected in the narratives where there is a strong concern about ensuring one's foothold in the labour market. The PES is described in highly negative terms and there is no sense of being secured during unemployment rather a sense of being controlled and treated in a condescending manner reflecting an overall discourse on unemployment and unemployed people as free riders and a burden to tax payers. In the current political debate, the discussion centres on the role of education and training in employment policies. The present government proposes to move emphasis from activation to education in the employment policy. This is a return to the policies of the 1980s where education and training played a central role in activation measures.

1.7.2. The global crisis – unemployment as an individual problem

The global crisis is pervading many of the interviews. Almost all the interviewees recruited through AS3 have become unemployed as a consequence of the global crisis. The crisis appears in many of the interviews as an explanatory factor for the interviewees' current situation. However, despite the crisis as a kind of backdrop there is also a strong tendency in the narratives to individualise the problems. The interviewees narrate unemployment as an individual problem, not as a collective problem which should be solved through political interventions. The public (neoliberal) discourse in which unemployment is a problem of mismatch between skills and labour market demand is something the interviewees take upon themselves. In short, there is a tendency for the interviewees to take responsibility for situations outside their control, for example, unemployment and stress (see below). Hereby the whole responsibility for re-skilling comes to rest on the individual.

1.7.3. Social downside of unemployment

What is striking from the iconic cases is the social downside of unemployment. Two cases illustrate people who were in higher positions and have higher level degree have better opportunities to make changes in their career. They have the financial space to take time out and reflect on their career. They can buy professional help such as coaches. They have the resources to react to the controlling forms of counselling at the job centres. Furthermore, they had been given six months of gardening leave, i.e. full salary in the transition period which provides a sense of security in this period – although it does not prevent a sense of urgency and stress.

1.7.4. Stress as an individual problem

Stress is an undercurrent in most of the interviews. Despite the fact that this was not a theme pursued and not even taken into consideration in the sampling, 11 out of the 21 Danish interviewees had suffered from stress in varying degrees. As with unemployment, stress was narrated as an individual problem to which there had to be found individual solutions, like ensuring a better work-life balance, going to psychotherapy, learning how to be mindful and present, etc. Stress can be identified as a potential contact point with support structures.

The search for mindfulness and meaningfulness also runs through the sample. Those who chose to make a radical career change did so out of consideration for making their lives more meaningful and being able to make a difference to other people. Their choice seemed to spread in ever-widening circles causing other people to reflect on their working life and what they would like to achieve in life. This may have something to do with the age of the interviewees being in their mid-life.

1.7.5. Further and continuing education and training

In the narratives, learning on-the-job is narrated as the most important mode of learning. Learning on-the-job is often seconded by courses closely related to the work and the company. In the case of Erik, who worked in an international company, a pre-destined career pathway was made possible through international and external courses. From the sample it also stands out that the higher position the more likelihood that the person will take part in further and continuing education and training. This picture fits into statistics drawn up by the Economic Council of the Labour Movement (Arbejderbevægelsens Erhvervsråd) from 2012. They showed that unskilled workers participate less in adult and further education than the rest of the labour force. The figures showed that those with a formal short-term higher education had a participation rate of 90% which was the highest in the labour market. Furthermore, that non-formal education

such as 'sitting-by-Nelly', internal seminars and courses are most widespread (AE, 2012b).

When it comes to participation in formal education and training, there are several barriers. The case of Mads shows how supervisors and managers are gatekeepers to training. The case of Mette shows how the unions can be gatekeepers and the case of Anna shows how the labour market (lack of apprenticeships) may turn out to be a gatekeeper. In all three cases, it is also evident that their own mind-set may prove a barrier along with social and economic capital. The case of Erik shows how the change of career in mid-life requires will power, resilience and determination, not to mention capital in all its forms. It raises a central question in this era of lifelong learning: how can midlife career change be handled – politically, socially and individually? The competence funds described in the section on the labour market context can be seen as a potential partial answer. It draws on the idea of vouchers and provides the individual with the right to continuous and further education and training. However, as they are managed by the unions and the requirements are laid down in collective agreements, they may prove a barrier to career change as in the case of Mads, if they do not facilitate any consideration of career change. This is something which could be further explored.

1.7.6. Transition as a productive pause

Transitions in education, guidance and employment policies are perceived as something to be smoothed out and reduced to a minimum. The idea of lean, cutting away the superfluous is dominant due to strained public budgets. However, the narratives open up another perspective on transitions: as a time for reflection where ideas mature and where learning can be transformative and lead to radical career changes. In the transitions, the interviewees point to the value of dialogue (in Danish: *samtale* – talking together) as an important support. The dialogue is based on an asymmetrical relationship and a significant other willing to listen. It can be family and friends, but also a private coach. In terms of the Danish guidance system, this points to the need for impartial and independent guidance – a task which PES seemingly has problems handling within a controlling policy framework.

Abbreviation list

PES	public employment service
AMU	<i>Arbejdsmarkedssuddannelser</i> [adult vocational training programmes]
VEU	<i>Voksen- og Efteruddannelse</i> [adult and continuing education]
GVU	<i>Grundlæggende voksenuddannelse</i> basic adult education
VFV	<i>Videreuddannelsessystemet for voksne</i> the adult higher education system
VVU	<i>videregående voksenuddannelser</i> further adult education programmes
VUC	adult education and training centre

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CHAPTER 2.

Italian national report

2.1. Theoretical context

The findings from Italy are placed in a theoretical context, which provides a background for the analysis of the Italian interviews but also provided a theoretical framing for the analysis of the results of the project as a whole. It takes into account an array of issues linked to the project's fundamental tenet – largely confirmed during the interview phase – that learning and career trajectories are strictly intertwined as relevant phenomena of the individual's participation in work/employment processes. Such phenomena and their interplay can be analysed in the light of an encompassing agency/structure model that keeps together on the one hand the individuals' affordances and dispositions, and on the other the labour market dynamics and the broader social-economic trends in which all learning and career evolutions take place.

This model has been enriched, while carrying out the project, by the more analytical framework set up at the beginning of our work. Within this framework, relevant issues include, for instance:

- on the agency side: gender, health and age; values and attitudes; competencies developed over life-course; career transitioning styles (evaluative, strategic, opportunistic, aspirational); forms of identity development; mind-sets (curiosity, resourcefulness, reflectiveness and many more);
- on the structure side: occupational and employment structures; formal learning opportunities provided by institutional systems like college, university, IVET, CVT, guidance systems; informal learning opportunities at work (linked to work organisation and to local structures like mentoring, supervision, peer support, etc.); social structures (like peers, family and friends).

Moreover, other important aspects included in the research's main framework are those related to identity factors (identity at work, coherence among identities over time; sense-making; self-narratives; identity threats; identity bricolage) and learning factors allowing successful transitions (such as for instance those included in the 'investigation-experimentation-reasoning-imagining' scheme).

Many of the aforementioned issues are deepened in this report, to reinforce theoretically the research framework of the project and also to analyse the interviews collected within the Italian section of the research. Such a deepening,

conceived as directly serving the overall project goals, tries to keep together four main conceptual foci:

- individualisation as an overarching phenomenon regarding social actors in work and employment processes in our neo-modern societies/economies;
- the construction of social identities in terms of knowledgeability and competencies;
- the many meanings of learning, in a structure-agency perspective, considering its function in individuals' lives and its intertwining with working, reflecting, innovating;
- the role of reflection and reflexivity as shaping factors of individuals' trajectories within social life, and more specifically within their own labour market transitions.

2.1.1. Individualisation processes – a neo-modern perspective

According to the project's intents, the ways in which learning supports career paths have to be understood through the lenses of an agency/structure model. Such a model can be declined in different ways according to the perspectives provided by different important authors (Giddens, 1991; Archer, 2003; 2007). Within this report the focus is not on their theories as such, but on the analytical opportunities provided by them. The starting point is the simple observation that in our epoch, much more than in traditional societies, individuals' flows of conducts (i.e. their agency) are not totally dependent variables of the surrounding institutional rules and resources (i.e. the structure in which the flows of conducts take place). Conversely, individuals are far from being autonomous from such rules and resources. The opportunities and hindrances stemming from socio-economic institutions (like education, VET, labour market regulations and many others) are highly influential on actors' conducts and on intended outcomes. From this standpoint agency and structure can be seen as kept in an indissoluble dialectic in which both terms presuppose one another (Giddens, 1979). And individuals, in relation to project goals, can be seen as participating in learning and in socio-professional mobility processes (transitions) as aware social actors. They are continuously exposed to structural effects (including those that induce unintended outcomes of their conducts) and at the same time are capable of 'acting differently', that is, of reshaping in one way or another the structural grips, constraints and conditions which influence their own actions.

This capacity of 'acting differently' and of finding individual evolutionary paths through even difficult structural conditions, especially as far as work and employment are concerned, can be considered as the marking sign of our epoch, usually defined in terms of neo-modernity or late modernity or reflexive modernisation (Beck et al., 1994). Relevant characteristics of autonomy and subjectivity are needed by individuals for surviving in this historical context.

These characteristics are integral part of present tendencies in western societies where individuals are facing swiftly changing situations of their own social and private life and are experiencing the need for increasingly greater personal responsibilities and choices (Bauman, 2002).

Autonomy, subjectivity, responsibility and choice seem to converge in the overarching phenomenon of individualisation. It represents nowadays a fundamental category through which human agency and identity can be re-interpreted and assumed as something new and complex when compared with the traditional societies. Human identity can be observed in the light of the shift 'from a given into a task' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Social actors are in fact individually charged with the full responsibility for their choices (not necessarily submitted to external authorities), for performing their tasks and even for the consequences – also in terms of their side-effects – of their performances. According to the analysts of neo-modernity, human beings are involved in complex social processes in which they do not appear as 'born into their identities' but, on the contrary, seem bound to the problem of frequent identity reshaping. The hallmark of modern living seems represented by the need to become what one is. Modernity puts a sort of compulsory self-determination in the place once occupied by the hetero-determination of social standing (Bauman, 2002).

In the field investigated by the project, even paid employment and the mobility needed for it – together with other fundamental social institutions concerning civil, political and social rights – appear, according to the neo-modern perspective, as directly geared to individuals and not to groups as they were in the past. From this viewpoint we are all involved in the paradox of an 'individualising structure' that gives rise to non-linear, open-ended, highly ambivalent and continuously on-going processes requiring 'biographical solutions to systemic contradictions' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Beck, 2013).

The structural causes of such an evolution of agency and identity are well-known. Their roots can be traced back to the centrality of work and organisation processes which are geared to ever increasingly sophisticated products and services, as they entail rapid innovations and knowledge-intensive applications. Within the knowledge-based economy or the learning economy (Lundvall and Borras, 1998) the intellectualisation of work had important consequences on the ways in which work is reproduced and controlled. Intrinsically, work in neo-modern situations requires less external control and more self-monitoring, reflection and reflexivity. Rules and resources of work contexts are not principally geared to control and become the objects of continuous learning and reflection in the sake of increased effectiveness and productivity by all those involved in them (Lash and Urry, 1994).

The recent process developments captured by neo-modernist analysts before the beginning of the new millennium confirm such analyses: the non-individualised areas of work devoted to material production and to bureaucracy are more and more put in jeopardy by the never-ending transformations of processes and transactions. On the contrary, the different layers of knowledge-intensive activities, intrinsically individualised, incorporate the most valuable segments of work and allow a comparatively easier survival on the labour market and in organisations for those who embody the knowledge and competencies needed to perform complex tasks. Not by chance, individualisation has become since the 1990s a crucial issue in managerial and organisational theories: the collapse of outmoded organisational forms has revealed the emergence of a fundamentally different management philosophy, focused on the power of the individual as the driver of value creation at the company level (Goshal and Bartlett, 1997).

During the first decade of this century, the crisis of all world economies – especially the European ones, in particular the southern Europe ones – has further sharpened such transformation effects. One can observe daily the destruction of thousands of jobs, mainly non-knowledge-based jobs, and the raise of precariousness in the great majority of working activities. Marginalisation has begun to involve even strata of knowledge workers, such as new entrants in labour market holding good or excellent education titles or older (just over 50) technicians and managers (Eichhorst et al., 2010; European Commission, 2012). Individuals are increasingly alone in facing the consequences of processes whose control is still held only partially by traditional economic and political authorities.

Individuals' trajectories vary extensively in relation to their positioning vis-à-vis such macro-structural transformations, becoming more and more complex in the recent past due to the intersection of two phenomena: the globalising knowledge-economy and the emergence of the economic crisis. Five main configurations of agency/structure seem distinguishable for the purposes of analysis of the Italian sample.

The first configuration concerns the working lives of individuals belonging to traditional relatively non-mobile blue or white collar categories, especially those advanced in their life cycle, holding stable or apparently stable job positions. Their engagement with structural constraints allows few or no opportunities for reshaping working and life trajectories as people in these types of work have relatively poor learning backgrounds and often have limited opportunities for learning from experience. People employed in the private sector are at high risk of losing their jobs if circumstances change and are then highly unlikely to be able to find alternative employment. In other sectors, for example in public services and bureaucracies, people are somewhat sheltered by long-term

contracts and long-standing protectionist regulations (but this is an increasingly shrinking shelter, due to the effects of the financial crisis on the public sector).

The second configuration mainly concerns people who hold unstable positions in the labour market, both in blue or white collar positions, within low-skilled job areas, but who are not young entrants. In this kind of configuration the lack of stability is coupled with a need for job mobility to other low skilled employment, which is a source of permanent disadvantage, anxiety and, to a large extent, poverty. The boundaries between employment and unemployment are fragile for these people and the opportunities for accessing learning sources (both formal and informal) very rare. They represent a major social problem and a complex research object, outside of the project's scope (to be taken into consideration in a follow-up research study commissioned by Cedefop in April 2013).

The third configuration can be seen as comprising people who also hold unstable positions in the labour market, within different activity areas, but who are younger than those previously mentioned. In many cases they hold educational qualifications of some value in the labour market and are better able to put up with the anxieties attached to unemployment and mobility. Being accustomed for instance to McJobs and more generally to precarious and mobile work and life styles, those inside such agency/structure interrelationships are severely constrained regarding the emergence of valid learning opportunities, but in some cases they have the means for the identification of sources of learning (e.g. small courses or short but enriching work experiences) which can positively influence their survival chances and represent sources of hope. In some cases these young people are engaging in greatly extended transitions before eventually achieving more stable employment.

The fourth configuration is of an interstitial nature, enabling and being reproduced by self-made individuals who have been allowed or are able to develop professionally and who are able to swiftly change their occupation (as self-employed or entrepreneurs in sectors like services, commerce, fast changing businesses, etc.), and who are also open to geographical mobility. In these areas one can identify people who had different levels of formal education and training, but whose social growth was largely independent from their educational background. Nevertheless the agency/structure interrelation enables some learning and development (mostly informal of course, but even formal in some cases, for instance when the 'self-made' person decides to enrich her competencies through a training experience). Learning for them can be a valuable resource as a support to their personal vision, including up-dating and facilitating mobility.

The fifth form of agency/structure entails rules and resources, and flows of conduct as well, concerning knowledge workers who perform professional and

managerial tasks inside or outside companies. They are mobile by nature and capable of continuously learning and reshaping their own knowledge bases together with their professional horizons.

Of course the above typology is only an ideal typical approximation to a much more complex reality: many real cases should be interpreted at the crossroads of two or even three of the above configurations. The above types are conceived in a 'distal' perspective, in many ways introductory to the more 'proximal' perspective involving the individual dimension explored by the present research study.

2.1.2. Construction of socioprofessional identity

The agency side of the so far sketched overall structural dynamics is represented by the individualisation of the ways in which people have to present themselves or even 'construct' themselves in the neo-modern contexts of life and work. Considering the focus of the project, when looking at individuals' trajectories it seems necessary to overcome the traditional analytical style based on types of 'rational choice' criteria applied to work and employment behaviours. Such behaviours seem only partly understandable in terms of univocal correspondences between given kinds of work activities, competencies needed for such activities and the formal education/training requisites for performing such competencies. On the one hand, the quality of 'informal' learning, gained by experience, represents an increasingly crucial factor for the establishment and reinforcement of work competencies. On the other hand, the alternation of different kinds of activity within a whole working life and the experience of shifts from different levels of job stability are not at all abnormal events. The rationality of choices embraces a broad spectrum (also including emotional factors, life-work balance factors, idiosyncratic attitudes, etc.), whose extreme width discourages any linear interpretation and reinforces the need for agency/structure kinds of reasoning in this field.

The increasing complexity of the latter is witnessed by the appearance of terms such as the boundaryless career or the protean career. In the first approach career trajectories are not represented by an orderly sequence and are seen as not necessarily tied to a single organisation. They are in many ways the opposite of organisational careers which unfold within a single employment setting (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). For different authors who studied these aspects, the boundaryless career stands for trajectories that revolve around different job opportunities (across organisational and inter-organisational boundaries) and that develop in relation to ambiguous job duties because of both objective and subjective factors (Briscoe and Hall, 2006). The protean career approach is more inclined towards the subjective factors and tries to shed light on the dynamics of individually defined goals, encompassing the whole life space,

as well as being driven by psychological success rather than objective success such as pay, rank, or power (Hall, 2002).

Different components are identified within these kinds of processes, such as evaluative components, pertaining to the sense given by an individual to her own good career or bad career and behavioural components, attached to the concrete actions (e.g. job mobility) undertaken to pursue specific objectives. The protean approach also takes into consideration factors such as the mind-sets about career, attitudes and values (e.g. freedom, self-direction). The extreme forms of this protean career would occur when the person's attitude toward her career reflects a sense of calling in her work—that is an awareness of a purpose that gives deep meaning to the career. In general the protean career alludes to the possibility of job changes more motivated by agentic drives and less constrained by structural routine paths.

The boundaryless or protean career constructs are only examples of the general, above mentioned, tendency towards individualisation as self-determination within work and employment dynamics. In many ways such a tendency can be seen as a manifestation of the self-identity phenomenon in late modernity (Giddens, 1991). In this perspective, far from being a stable entity, the 'self' can be seen as something that social actors have to reflexively construct within the boundaries of a dialectical relationship with the structure in which the manifestations of the Self take place. Such a reflexive construction has to face 'a puzzling diversity of options and possibilities' inside a reality full of uncertainties and contradictions. The self-construction of identity is accompanied by conditions of trust (the conditions – e.g. at familial level – that allow the subject's 'ontological security' and the reproduction of the individual 'protective cocoon') and, at the opposite extreme, by conditions of risk (as every human project is likely to diverge from its anticipated outcomes and contains numerous imponderables). At the same time every self-construction experience takes place within social-structural conditions largely influenced by systems ('expert systems' and 'symbolic tokens' in the Giddensian jargon) that mediate the relationships between the subject and its world. Reaching a specific self-identity is therefore a complex issue: it is a 'reflexively organised endeavour' sustained by coherent biographical narratives and by specific capabilities of making choices that can grasp the meaning of specific structural conditions and influences and positively act in relation to them.

Human agency and the reproduction of self-identity are therefore strictly intertwined to act and to reproduce oneself every actor in late modernity has to reflexively monitor her actions, to evaluate her courses of action (and actions' outcomes) and to act according to what is typical of the lifestyle to which she belongs. In doing so she has to put in action her knowledgeability, which can be considered as a general requisite, of a paramount importance in late-modernity

life. It is articulated into three main components; the knowledgeability embedded in the tasks required by everyday life (linked to practical consciousness); the ability (stemming from the discursive consciousness and linked to the requisite of accountability) to verbally express knowledge, in particular producing coherent narratives about personal actions, motivations and results; and the contextual knowledge which reflexively contributes to the development of structure. Of course, all these knowledgeability traits are subject to enabling or constraining factors stemming both from the specific structural characteristics and from personal capabilities attached to age, cognitive/physical limits, emotional awareness and many other aspects.

In the agency/structure correlations involved in all work and employment situations, including of course 'transitions', every social actor has to carefully design her self-identity and to go through the opportunities and hindrances of her specific reality, tapping her personal knowledgeability resources beyond the – of course very much needed – formal knowledge resources. In these terms it is interesting to re-visit the competency theory developed in the last 20 years by several relevant scholars and experts (Boyatzis, 2008; 2009; Eraut, 1998, Spenser and Spenser, 1993). The hypothesis – put into action within the project interviews' administration and analysis – is that self-identity and knowledgeability have much to do with the essence of competencies.

Competency can be in fact assumed as an 'underlying characteristic of an individual, causally-related to effective or superior performance' and more usefully – for the project's purposes – as a capability, or ability, related to sets of behaviours organised around an intent (Boyatzis, 2008). The latter is to be considered as complementary to any action performed by a subject. The 'intent' sustains the individual action through knowledge, vision, values and other elements that keep the individual in effective interaction with the job demand (in terms of task, function and role) as well as with the organisational environment characteristics (culture, climate, structures, systems, etc.). At least for analytical purposes, the behavioural approach of competencies can go hand in hand with the phenomenological approach to self-identity. The former is generally used in support of goals of performance measurement and of behavioural techniques aimed at identifying the talents in given organisational settings. However, nevertheless it can be usefully put in the service of the project's analysis, as a way for better understanding the development axis of transitions dynamics, largely determined by individuals' inclinations and dispositions.

In these terms, the individual 'intent' can well represent the sum of the agentic positioning that the competency theory represents through a complex set of competencies including as outlined by Boyatzis (2008):

- cognitive competencies, such as systems thinking and pattern recognition;

- emotional intelligence competencies, including self-awareness and self-management competencies, such as emotional self-awareness and emotional self-control;
- social intelligence competencies, including social awareness and relationship management competencies, such as empathy and teamwork.

It is evident that the extent to which individuals are able to put into action such competencies is directly correlated to the success of their self-identity construction, and to the acquisition of a sustainable knowledgeability status as well, within their career trajectories.

2.1.3. Learning in an agency/structure perspective

Learning is a complex phenomenon which unfolds in life-long and life-wide dimensions and takes place within different environments. It is usually described in terms of 'formal learning' (acquired through the educational and VET channels) and 'informal' (gained through experience in life and work settings). Except for a short space in these introductory notes, no specific comment is dedicated to such concepts, which are covered by a rich literature, including the huge mass of official documents (e.g. Werquin, 2010) and a comparatively much more limited array of critical contributions (e.g. Coffield, 2000). Also the more ambiguous concept of non-formal learning is not taken into consideration here.

What seems important from the project's standpoint is to put together some references which might reinforce an agency/structure approach to learning, in view of an appropriate interpretation of the field's research outcomes. In this perspective learning can be seen as a specific human function, related to the acquisition, use and exchange of knowledge and playing a specific, crucial role for the development processes of those involved in work and employment trajectories. Following this perspective the contraposition formal v/s informal does not appear as a rigid divide but as a quasi-continuum in which rules and resources from educational institutions and work and organisation settings are correlated with specific individual flows of action, linked to individuals' knowledge bases, knowledgeability statuses and competency sets they were able/allowed to develop over time.

Every citizen of neo-modernity, being exposed to the ever growing role of socially needed knowledge, has to find her positioning in the quasi-continuum of learning. As it is for organisations (and even for territories and states), the individuals' learning capabilities are in fact the real source of their competitive advantage (Lundvall and Borras, 1998), assuming the latter term as almost a synonym of 'career opportunities' or in other terms of 'economic self-sufficiency' or at least, of 'survival' in a complex and competitive society.

Considering the above suggested typology of the forms structure can take for different social-professional strata (see Section 2.1.2 above), it seems

possible to depict different configurations of learning opportunities and constraints for each type. Such opportunities and constraints directly influence the individuals' ways of accessing knowledge, acquiring knowledgeability and developing competencies and therefore have remarkable impacts, for better or worse, on career paths and transition dynamics.

Within the first type of structural conditions – i.e. individuals belonging to traditional blue or white collar categories, especially those advanced in their life cycle – the opportunities for learning are generally weak. Very little can be expected by those belonging to such strata from 'formal' education channels, except in the cases in which some kind of remedial training initiative is organised by companies or public institutions to cope with the risk of those in this group enlarging the army of redundant workers. On the other hand, the informal learning related to work-process knowledge (Boreham et al., 2002) and to participation in communities of practice (Wenger et al., 2002) – once considered as a real asset for the components of 'workers' aristocracies', older middle-managers and other traditional groups – is at present made volatile by the speed of technological progress and by the increasing domination of financial logics in every activity sector.

People inside these strata are usually aware of the loss of power they are exposed to, brought about by the impossibility of effectively renewing their learning backgrounds. But they can do very little in this regard. Their self-identity at work is largely pre-defined and the spaces for autonomous innovation and competencies development are close to zero. In a way the situation of 'sheltered' staff in backward services is even worse considering that their apparently firm positions, increasingly on the verge of redundancy-creating restructuring, de facto hinder their self-awareness and the possible search for some kind of developmental learning. Transition is a highly risky term for these strata: it generally means transition towards hopeless unemployment conditions (supported by the public welfare within some legislation, not supported in others).

The situations of those in the second previously defined type of structural form – i.e. people holding unstable positions being not young and educationally/culturally deprived, can be considered a worse version of the previous one. They usually have very poor opportunities or none for accessing learning and are subjectively constrained by life conditions in which their time is all dedicated to mere survival needs.

On the contrary, the 'educated unstable' of the third kind of structural conditions – socially depressed but culturally richer people, who are not disadvantaged by age – are more able to put up with difficulties and are structurally inclined towards learning development. More and more frequently in different national contexts the economic crisis has generated high rates of youth unemployment and underemployment, even among people holding high school

or university qualifications. These young precarious workers often exhibit remarkably resilient attitudes and behaviour. Transitions in these cases are normal events in life and are therefore perceived also as transformational chances to be sustained by learning initiative at both formal and informal level. Along with their poor employment opportunities (low level jobs or no job at all) these strata can attend courses at different levels and are able to valorise the experiential learning accumulated even within short-term job positions. For instance, McJobs can be the starting point for work socialisation, for a better understanding of the meaning of work and for the restructuring of self-identities (Gould, 2010).

Within the fourth of the previously identified forms – individuals who have been able/allowed to professionally grow and to swiftly change their occupation (as self-employed or entrepreneurs in services, commerce, fast changing businesses, etc.) – learning is usually a valuable resource in support of personal vision, up-dating and mobility. These kinds of people, holding qualifications and degrees but oriented towards very practical goals, tend to valorise the experiential side of learning, for instance in terms of learning from clients, from providers, and from competitors. Even from peers, within different forms of cooperation, cooperation, and exchange. But their open-mindedness can push them even to profit from formal education/training opportunities, such as short courses for the acquisition of new specific technical knowledge complementing their competence background. Self-identity construction and knowledgeability status are fundamental issues for these dynamic strata as they have to continuously update their forms of self-presentation and professional legitimization.

The fifth form of structure regards people having something in common with the previous strata but on the average holding higher education qualifications, higher jobs and of course higher opportunities/dispositions for learning. This structural form is typically the one of middle-high level knowledge workers inside or outside companies, mobile and potentially able to move within different positions: for example employee or consultant or head or partner in a small enterprise. Learning for these strata is bread and butter. Their survival and development opportunities stem from their ability to hold large knowledge corpora (acquired through education at different levels) and to continuously enrich and reshape their operational knowledge, innovating the disciplinary background in relation to specific practices and to the expected outcomes for specific clients (according to the logic of the 'reflective practitioner', Schön, 1983; 1987). Their learning is therefore directly linked to their self-construction and knowledgeability and to the opportunities for improving their competence-based competitive advantage.

2.1.4. Role of reflection/reflexivity as shaping factors of individual learning and career paths

It is now possible to move from the more ideal typical or distal way of looking at the agency/structure correlations in terms of learning and career paths to a proximal approach, closer to the individual dimension which characterises our project. At this level the role of reflection and reflexivity emerges as the highest learning-related function, as regards not only the acquisition of knowledge needed for specific career trajectories but also the practical uses of learning in relation to the expected outcomes within the career. Reflection and reflexivity – often used as a quasi-synonym and at the same time treated differently by different authors – add a specific depth to the meaning of learning, whether it is acquired through education/training processes or by exposure to practical experiences.

Important inputs for understanding the role of learning in individuals' lives and career paths come from the model of reflective learning and transformational learning elaborated over time, since the 1970s of the last century up to recent periods (Mezirow 1981; Mezirow and Taylor 2009). Mezirow's constructivist model – generated on the basis of important large scale empirical research studies – tries to explain the ways in which the existential challenges of adulthood involve processes of transformations in meaning perspective or perspective transformations. The meaning perspective is composed by psycho-cultural assumptions within which new experience is assimilated and transformed. The process of perspective transformation is therefore equated to the emancipatory process whereby individuals become critically aware of their own assumptions and take action to overcome them. Such a process is articulated into different learning levels, from a partial re-elaboration of well-known meanings and related practices up to an aware perspective transformation involving the subject's meanings and courses of action (Mezirow, 1991).

Other approaches – especially those linked to phenomenological traditions – operate clearer distinctions between reflection and reflexivity. Reflection is represented by the idea of a mirror image reflecting an objective reality which is simply 'out there': from such an objectivist stance, the subject reflects on objects which stand in front of her (e.g. a problem to be solved, a situation to be tackled, a goal to be reached). On the contrary, reflexivity is assumed as located on a more subjectivist side, as it aims at shedding light on the internal moves of the subject, on her motivations, doubts, contradictions, dilemmas which arise from the interaction with specific situations. Individuals are reflexive in relation not (or not only) to external objects but to options, choices and values which are rooted in their own past and to strategies and dreams with regard to their future (Cunliffe, 2002; 2009). In this perspective reflexivity seems to represent well the ultimate locus of learning within career trajectories. In particular, it allows the

explanation of the ways in which actors question the meanings of their actions along both a synchronic axis (in relation to already established goals, assumptions, etc.) and a diachronic axis (considering that actions are connected in temporality, in the becoming of the actors themselves and of their agency) (Cunliffe, 2002).

Reflexivity is a fundamental human function, in principle always active but especially alive when triggered by special moments, like for instance – in the project's perspective – the transition moments. Borrowing Mezirow's expression they trigger disorienting dilemmas whose solution demands more or less deep changes. Such dilemmas show in fact different levels of intensity in relation to the external circumstances demanding a perspective transformation and a parallel new critical sense of agency and personal responsibility. In a quite similar vein, within the phenomenological view, the dilemmatic nature of periods and events that bring reshaping and turnarounds are seen as fateful moments. These are moments requiring imagination to cope with change situations, i.e. 'times when events come together in such a way that an individual stands, as it were, at a crossroads in his existence' (Giddens, 1991, p. 113).

However reflexivity is not only taking place when individuals have to cope with disorienting dilemmas and fateful moments: it is a crucial function normally related to agency and structural factors. At this regard, important inputs for the project come from the work of Margaret Archer and in particular from her vision of reflexivity, different both from Giddens' approach and from a conception of human action as basically channelled by routines and habitus (Bourdieu, 1998). It is also different from any deterministic (hydraulic) theory, interpreting what social actors do in terms of a combination of pushes and pulls to which they are subject. Archer's interest focuses on the manner in which individuals reflexively make their own way through the world (Archer, 2007). Crucial for such a process is the internal conversation that most human agents develop with themselves, concerning both the situation in which they are placed and the feelings, visions and projects through which they act in relation to the external world (Archer, 2003). Through the internal conversation, people become 'active agents' of their own trajectories and exercise some governance over their own lives (as opposed to 'passive agents' to whom things simply happen).

In Archer's model, reflexivity is an intermediary element between structure and agency. Structural (and cultural) properties are in fact seen as objectively forging social situations and contexts that individuals involuntarily have to cope and to live in. Such properties have a generative power regarding individuals' courses of action, either enabling or constraining them. Social actors (agents), on the other side, subjectively define their own configurations of concerns on the basis of personal identity factors (considering that personal identity can be seen as a constellation of ultimate concerns). Reflexivity is the means allowing the

mediation of structure as it guides the subjective deliberations which it brings to the design of specific projects, more or less successfully related to the objective circumstances.

This kind of model seems highly coherent with the ways in which the project has been conceived and carried out. Human trajectories in learning and career paths can be in fact observed using another of Archer's frames based on the sequence (of course not an ordered and not a necessarily successful sequence) of concerns, projects and practices. Concerns regard what the subjects wish to realise on the basis of their 'internal goods'. Projects stem from the concerns and are regulated by specific individual micro-politics. Practices have to be sustainable by the subjects and capable to bring them to a plausible *modus vivendi* with their own reality, reaching a sustainable alignment between personal and social identity.

Every single human behaviour differs in some degree from others. The ways in which the above mentioned sequence unfolds are very specific in relation to the interplay of structural conditions, agency opportunities and reflexive capabilities in every single case. Archer, however, provides an interesting typology articulated into four types of 'reflexives', defined as autonomous, communicative, meta-reflexive and fractured.

Autonomous reflexives are those people having a well-developed internal conversation and who are usually acting on the basis of their own ideas, although able to get information and advice from significant others (inside and outside family and inner circles). Their choices relate to appropriate action strategies and are based on clear calculations of ends/means ratios.

Communicative reflexives, on the contrary, consider relationship as the crucial issue in work and more generally in life and tend to continuously confront their ideas with people in their contextual continuity. They rarely rely only on their own judgments. They tend to be resistant to change.

Meta-reflexives are mostly interested in ultimate goals and values (keen in discerning those to be pursued from those to be rejected). They tend to question all life issues; search for roles that fit with their aspirations and like lateral mobility.

Fractured reflexives frequently fail their courses of action; have a mixed up internal conversation; are unsure about their position in society and in work systems.

This scheme is largely applicable to learning and career paths dynamics. It can be easily used along with the other scheme looking at individuals in terms of their own professional decision-making styles: aspirational, evaluative, strategic, opportunistic (Bimrose and Barnes, 2010).

2.1.5. **Analytical issues**

The above sketched constructs will be used for the fertilisation of the rich material collected within the field interview activities. On another side, they can converge in the project's theoretical framework. In the light of the previous overview, learning appears as a phenomenon constituted by formal and informal aspects influencing individuals' knowledgeability, self-identity, and competencies. These aspects all come all into play in career paths oriented by individuals' reflexivity. Therefore, the most relevant drivers of the analysis of the Italian interviews can be depicted as follows.

• contextual rules and resources in terms of knowledge and learning	Structural opportunities and constraints
• individual conducts and the role of learning in support of them • individual conducts and relevant transitioning factors (fateful moments, health factors, gender issues, resilience)	Individual agency
• capabilities for transformative learning • learning and self-identity construction (especially in transition experiences) • individual concerns and alignment between personal and social identity • learning and competencies development	Learning and development
• reflexivity types • decision-making styles	Career orientation

2.2. **The Italian context – Recent social and labour market trends**

Given its qualitative nature, based on individual narratives, the project is at a distance from a statistical-economic type of analysis. Structure, as assumed in the project, is always interconnected with agency: it could be even seen as a projection of agency, insofar as social actors can – with different degrees of effectiveness – actively interact with – and sometime can sensibly affect – the structural frameworks of rules and resources that foster and/or hinder actors' courses of action. Nevertheless it is absolutely clear that individual actions are largely conditioned by the macro-structural patterns at the basis of social phenomena and labour market dynamics as they unfold at national State level. A short analysis of some facts and figures concerning both the Italian social situation and the labour market structures and trends will therefore help to better understand the general conditions in which the project's protagonists live and act.

The concise picture provided here regards both short term trends and slow-paced structural changes. It tries to illustrate different structural determinants of the well-known Italian crisis. The latter is in general dramatically measured by the continuous decrease of the GDP and increase of unemployment figures. In 2012 the GDP reflected a 2.2% annual decrease after six consecutive quarters of negative growth: the longest recession for 20 years (ISTAT, 2013a).

Unemployment, on the other hand, rose to almost to three million, showing an annual growth rate of 22.7%. The unemployment rate has risen to 11.7% which corresponds to a 2.1% increase in the last 12 months. Almost 40% of Italian youth are currently unemployed: the highest figure since 1992. Moreover, this percentage hides sharp disparities in terms of geography and gender, increasingly accrued by the economic crisis: 29.7% of youths are unemployed in northern Italy; 39.3% in the Centre and 50.5% in the south. While in the north unemployment is evenly distributed between genders (29.6% men, 30% women), the disparity increases significantly in the Centre (36.1% male, 43.6% female) and in the south (46.7% male, 56.1% female) (ISTAT, 2013a).

Even public employment – which, for better or worse, traditionally represented an area of labour supply absorption – tends to show signs of subsidence. At present (data 2010), the ratio of public employees to 100 citizens is 5.8, lower than in Spain (6.5), UK (9.2), France (9.4) and slightly higher than in Germany (5.4). This is the result of measures such as the non-replacement of turn-over and the hiring of new personnel with short-term and unsecured contracts. Public employment, previously protected against reforms and deregulation, has ceased to be an untouchable stronghold, in response to the necessity of cutting public expenditure (Panara et al., 2013).

Such figures show how narrow the passages are through which women and men have to go to accomplish successful transitions and make their living and participate in socio-economic processes. Because of the crisis the short-term economic downturns are strictly intertwined with long terms causal factors. Among the latter a very relevant one is represented by a basically altered demographic balance. The country is characterised by a very low fertility rate (1.4 children per woman), very high life expectancy (79 years for men, 84 years for women) and consequently a rapidly aging population. According to ISTAT, the National Institute of Statistics, the dependency ratio ⁽⁸⁾ is 52.3% in 2011 and shows an increasing trend, so that in 2030 it is expected to reach 63.2% (ISTAT, 2013a). In such a context, the Italian welfare system is under serious pressure; reforms appear often as a retrenchment in disguise and, in general, the safety net provided by the ‘visible hand’ until the recent past is gradually shrinking. The immigration flux partially counterbalances the demographic stagnation: with more than 4.5 million immigrants and among the highest immigration growth rates in Europe, Italy qualifies as an important settlement for East European, African and Asian minorities who contribute significantly both to the natural increase of the population and to the production processes (ISTAT, 2013a).

⁽⁸⁾ Ratio of non-working age population (0-14; 65 and over) to working age population (15-64).

A second relevant issue, in some ways linked to demographic factors and to the tensions they induce on the social reproduction mechanisms, is constituted by the sharp increase of social inequality, so that it is realistic to talk about a polarisation in the distribution of wealth and income. According to OECD figures, the Gini coefficient concerning the distribution of income in Italy in the late 2000s is among the highest in Europe, close to that of the US (0.337, compared to: 0.378 in the US; 0.293 in France; 0.295 in Germany; 0.317 in Spain and an average of 0.316 in the OECD countries). Italy is one of the most unequal countries in Europe, outstripped only by the UK and Portugal (OECD, 2012). Between the mid-1980s and the end of the 2000s, the real income available for the working age population has increased by 126 billion, of which one third went to the 10% wealthiest citizens and only the scraps (8 billion) to the 10% poorest. Currently, the 1% wealthiest citizens possess about 10% of the total income, so that every rich Italian citizen owns as much income as 100 poor citizens (Pianta, 2013). Poverty and social exclusion are growing, as an effect of unfair distribution of wealth, income and social security. In 2013 three million under 18 year olds (practically, one out of three) are at risk of poverty; among them, the worst off are children whose parents have a low educational attainment, are immigrants or unemployed (Eurostat, 2013). This speaks clearly about social immobility, or even paralysis. To worsen the situation, the last government had not been able to replace, or at least back up, austerity measures with policies to foster economic growth. The social climate is therefore filled with anger and anxiety, feeding a vicious cycle of stagnation, pessimism and loss of potential.

These social aspects have to be taken into consideration when looking at the labour market dynamics, which cannot be viewed merely from an economic viewpoint. Social inequalities go hand in hand with the accentuated labour market segmentation which – within the present analysis – can be assumed as a third relevant factor of crisis. The so called atypical jobs (short-term contracts, often underpaid) are held disproportionately by the weakest groups: women, young people, immigrants and less educated workers. The work agreements concerning such social groups offer, if compared with lifelong contracts, much less access to benefits, such as paid leave, and weaker social security, other than entailing scarce upward mobility and higher risk of losing employment. In a Mediterranean welfare model where entitlement to welfare benefits depend on a stable position in the labour market, the weaker segments of the labour market are exposed to a double factor of marginalisation (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

The risk of being sucked into the marginalised strata is increasingly high. It can be avoided only through a multiplication of individual efforts, in terms of acquisition of a middle-high education level and an incisive combination of motivation, skills, and creative resilience. But such individual dispositions have to face a generalised situation of a lack of opportunities for regular careers within

the productive system. Factors such as unemployment, alteration of the demographic balance, social inequalities, and many others are now further propelled by an unprecedented loss of weight of the industrial sector, which traditionally constitutes the Italian economy's backbone, and, more generally, by the reduction in activity in every sector.

In the country's economic history a certain degree of socio-economic balance could have been assured by the same structure where there was a prevalence of SMEs and micro-enterprises, more flexible in situations of overall financial and economic turmoil. According to the most recent figures, the highest rate of employment is reached by very small businesses: those under 10 employees host the 46% of national total employment while this percentage is 12% for those in the class 10-19 employees, 10% for those between 20 and 49 employees, 12% for middle sized companies (50-249) employees and 19% over 250 employees (OECD, 2012). The importance of micro and small sized enterprises is paralleled by the relevance of self-employment: of a total working population ranging around 23 million (22 967 000: data 2012) ⁽⁹⁾, the employees are 17 240 000 while the self-employed are 5 727 000 (about 25%) (ISTAT, 2013b). However, the traditional strength of the small company sector is diminishing in the present on-going crisis. Micro and small companies are folding at an extraordinary rate, due to the collapse in market demand and the fiscal crisis of the state as well (the Italian public administration is incapable of honouring its debts). Employed and self-employed, workers and micro-entrepreneurs have to face the harsh reality of increasingly shrinking activities in a crisis whose end seems far and highly problematic.

2.3. The Italian sample

The Italian sample all had experience of working in intermediate level positions, before moving on to a range of positions working for relatively large companies, small enterprises, being self-employed or working in clerical or retail environments. Of the 20 interviewees, 17 were interviewed a second time to see how their careers were progressing. For various reasons entry into mid-range skilled work in Italy typically takes a long time, with extended transitions. Italians for many reasons are characterised by late entrance in the labour market, as

⁽⁹⁾ These data are per se very significant: they shed light on the general situation of work as a limited resource. The working population amounts to a little bit more than one third of the total (23 million on a population of about 60 million), while, comparatively, in Germany the same ratio is around a half (about 40 million on a population of about 80 million). Work, as both resource and commodity, is rare in Italy.

evidenced by official statistical data. Partly to reflect this, the Italian sample tends to comprise mainly those in their 40s. In the Italian context the role of networks seems to be very important and the sample afforded the opportunity to see whether this was so in a range of very different contexts.

		Age	Occupation
Firm environments	Masuccio	O	human resources professional
	Italo	O	communication professional
	Berta	O	unemployed, marketing professional
	Roberta	O	sales in foreign markets
	Paloma	Y	accountant
	Alex	Y	computer technician
Micro and small entrepreneurship	Diana	O	credit collection specialist
	Hannah	Y	wine specialist
	Adelia	O	entrepreneur in photovoltaic energy
	Romano	O	independent retailer
	Emiliano	Y	sales agent
Self-employment	Irma	O	inter-culture operator
	Gianni	O	TV director
	Tatiana	O	unemployed, cinema director
	Sara	Y	art market, pastry making
	Lucia	O	dressmaking instructor
Clerical and retail	Loredano	O	clerk (disabled worker)
	Mina	O	clerk (part-time) in private school
	Aurelia	Y	clerk in private university
	Elisabetta	Y	saleswoman

* Y = 40 or younger (usually 35-40)
O = 41 or over (usually 41-45)

2.3.1. Strategic learning and career biographies – Summaries

Berta	
Current occupation and employment status	unemployed (self-granted sabbatical)
Age range	older age group
Personal characteristics	female; divorced two years ago; from one year living with a new partner in a different city, together with two daughters
Geographical mobility	lived in different cities all over Italy, one year ago moved from a small town in Emilia-Romagna to Rome. Change of place due to willingness of following the new partner and of searching new work and life horizons
Education and training paths	four year university degree (language studies, Russian and, in particular Polish)
Significant jobs/positions which have been held	assistant in a publishing house; classic dance teacher; foreign languages correspondent in a SME (furniture) then specialising in marketing in the same firm for eight years; consultant in marketing for different SMEs; at present studying marketing and coaching
Reasons for relevant transitions	search for new experiences, exploration of opportunities requiring different mind-sets

Key aspects of learning and development	highly motivated in learning from practice; also long CVET course in marketing (1200 hours)
Career decision-making style	strategic/aspirational
Career biography thumbnail sketch	older female: linguistic studies degree; dance teacher; eight years work in a furniture company (including the CVET course); four years as consultant in marketing; high motivation towards challenging and creative work situations
Geographically mobile internationally	long study period in Poland, living in different cities all over Italy, open to wider mobility

Italo	
Current occupation and employment status	external communication practitioner in a research and lobbying organisation representing Italian brands
Age range	older
Personal characteristics	male; married, one son; living in small town in the Milan hinterland
Geographical mobility	Stable
Education and training paths	upper secondary technical school (for chemical technicians), one year attendance of university studies (quit)
Significant jobs/positions which have been held	journalist in different small local magazines for several years; other temporary jobs; working in the research and lobbying organisation for a total of eight years (four + four, in between three years in a large beverages company as communication expert)
Reasons for relevant transitions	finding occasions for expressing good performance standards
Key aspects of learning and development	self-taught person; learning from experience; one relevant CVET experience
Career decision-making style	strategic
Career biography thumbnail sketch	Older male; no university studies; several low profile experiences in local journals; eight years in the present organisation; three years in another firm (see above) as a strategic transition for more learning in his professional field.

Masuccio	
Current occupation and employment status	human resources professional
Age range	older
Personal characteristics	male; single; born in Milan; living in Rome
Geographical mobility	mobile; lived in the US; frequent changes of workplace in relation to professional mobility
Education and training paths	degree in Physics; further studies in management later in career.
Significant jobs/positions which have been held	call centre operator; R&D assistant in SME for two years; consultant in different consultancy companies for five years; human resources expert in a big utility company for about three years

Reasons for relevant transitions	income; interest for high level positions (never attained)
Key aspects of learning and development	successful university and post-university studies; learning from vast work experience
Career decision-making style	strategic
Career biography thumbnail sketch	older male; several work experiences in consultancy (see above); highly engaged; not successful in pursuing his ultimate goals. Very open to geographical and professional mobility

Roberta	
Current occupation and employment status	foreign sales specialist in a SME (plastic products)
Age range	older
Personal characteristics	female; married; one child; living in small town close to Milan
Geographical mobility	stable
Education and training paths	linguistic lyceum; degree in Communication Science (four years)
Significant jobs/positions which have been held	teacher in lower middle-school; employed in two multinational companies located in the Milan hinterland; clerk in her village municipality (two years); at present foreign sales specialist in a SME (for five years)
Reasons for relevant transitions	search for human work environment; looking for conciliation between work and family life
Key aspects of learning and development	largely learning from experience; never in education and training while working (multinationals don't like education)
Career decision-making style	opportunistic
Career biography thumbnail sketch	Older female; rather good professional capabilities in different environments (see above); willingness to keep within the boundaries of a ordered life. Mobility limited to the strict needed exigencies of a sales professional

Mina	
Current occupation and employment status	clerk (part-time) in a private school
Age range	older
Personal characteristics	female; single; seriously ill with cancer for many years.
Geographical mobility	working (at the beginning of her career) in Arab countries and Africa; at present highly stable
Education and training paths	degree in Geology
Significant jobs/positions which have been held	working with different design and consultancy companies in that field for five years; after surviving her disease found a quiet job (clerk in an English primary school and kindergarten) and cultivated interests in dance training
Reasons for relevant transitions	initially interest for her field and search of development opportunities; subsequently health reasons
Key aspects of learning and development	learning form experience; acquisition of fluency in English (useful for her makeshift)

Career decision-making style	strategic/opportunistic
Career biography thumbnail sketch	older female; intense start of professional activity in different design and consultancy companies for five years, employed ad geologist; hard human experience with cancer; search for self-fulfilment

Lucia

Current occupation and employment status	permanently employed, part-time, as a professional dressmaking instructor. Occasional jobs as a consultant
Age range	older
Personal characteristics	female; divorced, two children in elementary school. Went part-time to accommodate child care
Geographical mobility	all life and career in Rome
Education and training paths	Education and training paths: post-secondary vocational degree (three-year programme in fashion and design)
Significant jobs/positions which have been held	stylist, pattern-maker and sampler in both artisan and industrial fashion firms; sewing, paper modelling and dressmaking teacher in a professional post-secondary school
Reasons for relevant transitions	search for new experiences at first; then maternity and childcare obligations
Key aspects of learning and development	highly motivated in learning from practice; strong desire for creativity and self-expression
Career decision-making style	evaluative/aspirational
Career biography thumbnail sketch	older female: three years' experience as a pattern maker and stylist in an artisan wedding dress atelier; five years' experience as stylist, paper pattern maker and sampler in industrial high fashion and prêt-à-porter firms; six years' experience as a computer-aided pattern maker in an industrial fashion firm; five years as a part-time assistant stylist and consultant in industrial fashion firms; three years as a dressmaking instructor in a professional post-secondary school. Changed jobs frequently both to learn new skills and to accommodate family needs. Geographically stable in Rome

Diana

Current occupation and employment status	entrepreneur – newly created small firm in the field of credit collection.
Age range	older
Personal characteristics	female; divorced, three children in their early 20s. Decided to open her own business mainly to create a future job opportunity for her family
Geographical mobility	all life and career in Rome
Education and training paths	high school degree; two years in university (law) without completing the course
Significant jobs/positions which have been held	19 years as office/administration manager for family-owned business in the field of electrical plant building; five years as a credit collector; two years as an entrepreneur
Reasons for relevant transitions	divorce and need of a significant income to support the family; will to create a family business to employ her children

Key aspects of learning and development	highly motivated in learning from practice; strong desire for independence and self-determination
Career decision-making style	strategic/opportunistic
Career biography thumbnail sketch	older female: 19 years' experience as office/administration manager in a family-owned business; five years as a credit collector; three years as an entrepreneur in the field of credit collection. Particularly inclined towards practical, experiential learning. Changed jobs to follow family plans and strong need of personal/professional independence. Geographically stable in Rome

Irma	
Current occupation and employment status	intercultural agent; events' organiser; multimedia executive producer
Age range	older
Personal characteristics	female; living with a male partner, in a small village in the Marche region
Geographical mobility	highly mobile; lived in China; work contacts all over the world
Education and training paths	degree in Languages (mostly Chinese); further studies in this field; training in theatre techniques and direction; continuous updating on a self-learning basis
Significant jobs/positions which have been held	official of the Canadian embassy in Rome for six years; working in China as translator and in different other roles in different periods for a total of seven years; experiences in theatre direction and as actress; at present engaged in organising events in which the intercultural relations factors (especially east-west) are stressed
Reasons for relevant transitions	search for engaging and authentic work outcomes
Key aspects of learning and development	learning from experience integrated with self-granted training activities
Career decision-making style	aspirational
Career biography thumbnail sketch	older female; versatile capabilities, mixing attitudes to listening and understanding and artistic orientations (see above); work assumed as engagement and life dedication. Very open to geographical and professional mobility

Gianni	
Current occupation and employment status	TV director, writer
Age range	older
Personal characteristics	male; living with a female partner and her adult daughter; in Rome
Geographical mobility	transferred to Rome after other mobility episodes (born in northern Italy)
Education and training paths	scientific lyceum; long attendance for university studies; economy first than political science; but dropped-out

Significant jobs/positions which have been held	cameraman; journalist in small reviews; assistant director for different local TV broadcasters (but never as an employee); director and programmes writer; stable work (but not as an employee) for major TV broadcaster
Reasons for relevant transitions	no more work (end of programmes; fired; restructurings)
Key aspects of learning and development	self-taught person; learning from experience and from others (relevant characters met in working life); no relevant training experience
Career decision-making style	opportunistic/aspirational
Career biography thumbnail sketch	Older male; difficult human/social relations; permanent conflict between reality and aspirations; trying to fully become an author

Tatiana

Current occupation and employment status	unemployed
Age range	older
Personal characteristics	female; married; one daughter; living in Rome; born in a small town in northern Italy
Geographical mobility	very much linked to work experience; tendentiously stable
Education and training paths	classic lyceum; degree in Arts, music and entertainment
Significant jobs/positions which have been held	animation activities for kids; librarian in a public library in her native town; member of cooperative enterprise in multimedia and cinema (for eight years); freelance TV and cinema director
Reasons for relevant transitions	search for excellent performance; implementation of ideals (a new culture of communication); political drivers
Key aspects of learning and development	university studies in a vibrant environment (led and inspired by Umberto Eco); learning from experience and from others (relevant characters met in working life); important self-granted training experiences
Career decision-making style	aspirational
Career biography thumbnail sketch	older female; incrementally accrued professional capabilities; sincere drive towards professional improvement

Sara

Current occupation and employment status	permanent part-time employee in a cultural foundation and self-employed in pastry making
Age range	younger
Personal characteristics	female; engaged, no children. Changed jobs mainly to satisfy strong need of creativity and self-expression; security needs in the background, but present. Strong social competencies and solid informal network supporting work transitions
Geographical mobility	all life and career in Rome
Education and training paths	university degree in modern literature with a major in contemporary art

Significant jobs/positions which have been held	two years as contemporary art gallery assistant; two and a half years as art gallery owner and manager; six years in a cultural foundation, at first as general office assistant and then promoted to event management; two years self-employment as creative pastry chef
Reasons for relevant transitions	need for professional space and personal fulfilment, desire to express creativity, passion for aesthetics and manual work
Key aspects of learning and development	importance of non-formal learning on the one hand (personal introspection, casual events, trial and error, etc.) and professional training on the other (dress-making, trompe l'oeil, wedding planning, pastry making, etc.).
Career decision-making style	aspirational/evaluative
Career biography thumbnail sketch	Younger female: two years as contemporary gallery assistant; two and a half years as art gallery owner and manager; six years in a cultural foundation, at first as general office assistant and then as event manager; two years self-employment as creative pastry chef. Transitions are guided by extrinsic motivations at the beginning and by internal discoveries and personal aspirations in a second phase. Geographically stable in Rome

Aurelia	
Current occupation and employment status	permanent employee in an American university consortium in Rome
Age range	younger
Personal characteristics	female; married, one young child. Changed jobs mainly to achieve permanent contract and income stability
Geographical mobility	all life and career in Rome, except for a year in England as a university Erasmus exchange student
Education and training paths	university degree in foreign languages and literatures
Significant jobs/positions which have been held	a year and a half as department assistant in a private firm providing technical assistance to small and medium enterprises in developing countries; six months as the assistant of a university professor; three years as office and administration manager for an association of Italian teachers of English that worked with the US Embassy in Rome; nine years as student affairs coordinator for an American university consortium in Rome
Reasons for relevant transitions	desire for a permanent contract and income stability
Key aspects of learning and development	learns mainly from problem solving and debriefing experiences; develops self-respect and professional identity over the years
Career decision-making style	strategic/opportunistic
Career biography thumbnail sketch	younger female: five years in administration and clerical work within two different organisations; six months as a university professor assistant; nine years as student affairs coordinator for an American educational institution in Rome. Changed jobs mainly to achieve income stability, obtain a permanent contract and a higher level of responsibility and recognition. Particularly inclined towards experiential learning and practical problem solving. Geographically stable in Rome

Elisabetta	
Current occupation and employment status	permanent employee; saleswoman in a swimwear shop in northern Italy
Age range	younger
Personal characteristics	female; divorced, no children. Changed jobs in a first phase to find personal satisfaction and, later, to achieve economic independence
Geographical mobility	all life and career in small local area in north-east of Italy
Education and training paths	high school degree with a focus on primary education and psychology
Significant jobs/positions which have been held	six years as a saleswoman for the husband's business, working both at a clothing store and at local open air markets; nine additional years in the family's business as a full-time saleswoman at open air markets; two years as employee for swimwear shop
Reasons for relevant transitions	search for personal satisfaction and economic independence
Key aspects of learning and development	mainly learns by doing, even if she recognises the important role of her school education, specifically the psychology, core of her secondary school curriculum
Career decision-making style	aspirational/opportunistic
Career biography thumbnail sketch	Younger female: 15 years in the family business (sale of made in Italy clothing) as saleswoman, buyer and general manager; two years as employee in a swimwear shop. Changed jobs in a first phase to find personal satisfaction and, after the separation from her husband, to achieve economic independence. Particularly inclined towards experiential learning and practical problem solving. Geographically stable in the local area

Hannah	
Current occupation and employment status	at the moment, she runs her own small business: a wine tasting school, specialised in Italian wines and located in Rome
Age range	younger
Personal characteristics	female; married, no children. Changed jobs mainly to find personal satisfaction and realise her aspirations
Geographical mobility	born and raised in Turkey (from German mother and Turkish father) spent 12 years working in Germany after university and then moved to Rome
Education and training paths	university degree in business administration and marketing. Vocational training in wine education with a British Academy and course to achieve the certification as sommelier (wine waiter) in Italy
Significant jobs/positions which have been held	four years as account manager in a German advertising agency; six years as IT project manager for a big German insurance company; five years as developer and manager of her own business located in Rome
Reasons for relevant transitions	search for personal, inner satisfaction and desire for independence
Key aspects of learning and development	mainly learns by doing, even if vocational training opportunities had a very important role in the latest, and most satisfactory, phase of her career. Recognises the role of university education in helping her to develop general problem solving skills

Career decision-making style	aspirational/evaluative
Career biography thumbnail sketch	younger female: 10 years altogether in large, structured businesses where she performed organisational roles, centered on communication and people coordination. five years as manager of her own small business, a wine tasting school in Rome. Particularly inclined towards experiential learning and social skills; effective and empathic communication style. Internationally mobile

Romano	
Current occupation and employment status	independent retailer (door-to-door)
Age range	older
Personal characteristics	male; married: one adult son living with family. Strong personality but no particular interest in work, considered only in its instrumental value (surviving, thriving if possible)
Geographical mobility	based in a small town in Emilia-Romagna. Changed place of residence once, to find a better work situation
Education and training paths	lower compulsory school (3a media). No interest at that time for school
Significant jobs/positions which have been held	helping family business; entertainer in a local radio station; worker in commercial company (freight forwarder); independent door-to-door retailer
Reasons for relevant transitions	search for better work and economic conditions; interest for independency
Key aspects of learning and development	naive inclination towards learning from experience
Career decision-making style	opportunistic
Career biography thumbnail sketch	older male: no educational qualifications; five years helping family business; three years as entertainer in a local radio station; five years as full-time worker in commercial company (freight forwarder); 10 years associate in independent door-to-door retail business, five years independent door-to-door retailer

Emiliano	
Current occupation and employment status	micro-entrepreneur (multi-client business agent for photovoltaic equipment)
Age range	Older
Personal characteristics	male; married: one young son. Frequent work changes. Highly motivated for independent work activities and success measured in terms of money and satisfaction
Geographical mobility	based in a small village in the Rome hinterland. No geographical mobility
Education and training paths	training certificate in VET school for secretary (when aged 17). Training course as business agent (135 hours, compulsory for the profession, at the age of 35)

Significant jobs/positions which have been held	occasional jobs even very young (14-15); micro-entrepreneur in constructions; freight carrier in a cooked meat factory; micro-entrepreneurs (running a coffee shop); sales agent for auto accessories; sales agent for photovoltaic equipment
Reasons for relevant transitions	search for better work and economic conditions; high motivation for making money
Key aspects of learning and development	extremely able in learning from experience
Career decision-making style	opportunistic
Career biography thumbnail sketch	older male: low level VET qualification; micro-entrepreneur in construction; five years as freight carrier in a cooked meat factory; one year as micro-entrepreneur (running a coffee shop); four years as sales agent for auto accessories; four years as sales agent for photovoltaic equipment and installation

Loredano	
Current occupation and employment status	switchboard operator in a public administration office (as sight disabled person, belonging to protected categories)
Age range	older
Personal characteristics	male; recently separated by his wife; one young children. Highly constrained by a serious sight disease, more acute in the second half of his life (almost blind). Nevertheless willing to operate at his best (not to get depressed)
Geographical mobility	born in Milan; transferred to Florence with his family at the age of 12. Not mobile
Education and training paths	school diploma in Accounting; training courses in dubbing and in tourism organisation
Significant jobs/positions which have been held	before sight disease: volunteer worker; free-lance teacher for kids; entertainer in a local radio station; worker in dubbing. After sight disease: worker in tourism agency; worker in events organisation agency; switchboard operator in a public administration office
Reasons for relevant transitions	search for interesting job until the age of about 35, then search for suitable work for disabled condition
Key aspects of learning and development	openness to learning for self-improvement
Career decision-making style	opportunistic
Career biography thumbnail sketch	older male: upper secondary school degree (accounting); first years in volunteer and occasional jobs (entertainer, dubber); six years as full-time worker in tourism agency (switchboard); worker in events organisation agency (both switchboard and other clerical tasks); switchboard operator in a public administration office

Adelia	
Current occupation and employment status	small entrepreneur (company in photovoltaic energy installation)
Age range	older

Personal characteristics	female; divorced; frequent changes; highly motivated towards self-development and professional success
Geographical mobility	low in terms of basic settlement; very frequent traveller – within national boundaries – for work reasons; long study period in Germany (studying German) when young
Education and training paths	university degree in Law (four years, for her seven years because of working while studying)
Significant jobs/positions which have been held	five years in an ICT company as programmer; cooperation in her father's fiscal consultancy business; co-authorship of technical manuals; freelance computer analyst and programmer for law firms; cooperation in marketing of computer-based services; consultancy and websites creation for commercial businesses; partner in a small company for the implementation of photovoltaic equipment
Reasons for relevant transitions	passion for learning while working; interest for personal achievement and economic autonomy
Key aspects of learning and development	Technology seen as a driving force for change and as a permanent source of methods and ways of seeing applicable to different professional endeavours
Career decision-making style	aspirational/strategic
Career biography thumbnail sketch	Older female; rich curriculum (several transitions: see above). Particularly inclined towards experiential learning and practical problem solving. Geographically stable; living in a bi-lingual environment (Italian South-Tyrol)

Alberto	
Current occupation and employment status	technician in ICT company operating for public administrations
Age range	younger
Personal characteristics	male; single; different changes; he has acquired a certain stability and acknowledgement but still unsatisfied (because of work load and uncertainty in company perspectives)
Geographical mobility	high in the middle phase of his career, within national boundaries. In the past open to geographical mobility. Now tending to stability
Education and training paths	higher middle school diploma (industrial chemistry)
Significant jobs/positions which have been held	two years in low profile occasional jobs; four years in an quasi-academic institute as industrial chemistry technician; 12 years in an ICT company as LAN technician, trainer, call center manager and system maintenance technician; two years in another ICT company as network-systems system and coordinator of his work team
Reasons for relevant transitions	search for higher salary, stability and job satisfaction
Key aspects of learning and development	Cultivation of development opportunities linked to specific technological advances; acquisition of good professional knowledge through self-learning (and some updating courses)
Career decision-making style	opportunistic

Career biography thumbnail sketch	Middle-aged male; significant curriculum. vitae; two years in low profile occasional jobs; four years in an quasi-academic institute as industrial chemistry technician; 12 years in an ICT company as LAN technician, trainer, call center manager and system maintenance technician; two years in another ICT company as network-systems system and coordinator of his work team
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Paloma	
Current occupation and employment status	accounting specialist in a large company in the electric energy industry
Age range	younger
Personal characteristics	female; single; four work changes; rather satisfied about her position and perspectives
Geographical mobility	born, grew up and educated in Sicily, working in Milan hinterland. Open to mobility (profiting of her single status)
Education and training paths	degree in Economics
Significant jobs/positions which have been held	two years in a job recruitment and employment agency(as temporary worker) ; one year in the front desk of a trade union service; one year as administrative clerk of a bank; eight years as accounting specialist in a large company in the electric energy industry
Reasons for relevant transitions	having a good job in a traditional work context; stability, being able to apply knowledge acquired in university studies
Key aspects of learning and development	Very much interested in her professional area; trying to transform acquired knowledge in a sound basis for a firm career
Career decision-making style	opportunistic/strategic
Career biography thumbnail sketch	Middle-aged female; medium-value curriculum. two years in a job recruitment and employment agency(as temporary worker) ; one year in the front desk of a trade union service; one year as administrative clerk of a bank; eight years as accounting specialist in a large company in the electric energy industry

2.3.2. Iconic cases

Mercuzio and Lucia were chosen and their cases are presented in the main report.

2.4. Analysis of the Italian interviews

2.4.1. Approach to analysis

The previous Sections (2.1 and 2.2) on the theoretical/analytical overview and recent Italian social and labour market trends are used to frame the analysis of the Italian stories/cases collected within the project's field phases. Considering different possible ways of presenting the rich array of data collected through the interviews, this section has been organised according to a thematic cluster method, at the crossroads of two main analytical criteria:

- the analytical drivers put forward in Section 2.1.5. as stemming from the general assumptions of the project and the deepening of such assumptions attempted in the theoretical overview;
- the agency/structure interrelation types put forward in Section 2.1.

Through this method, it seems possible to identify several relevant commonalities among different structural conditions and agency dispositions narrated in the life-stories. The intention is not to flatten the sample's complexity but, on the contrary, to cover a wide range of agency/structure conditions (within the limits established for the inclusion of interviewed subjects in the sample) and to valorise the differences. The general aim is the one of identifying common traits and producing manageable research outcomes, plausibly useful in the research goals' perspective, including those closer to the generation of suggestions for European policy design in fields such as lifelong learning, VET, CVET, and lifelong career guidance.

Considering the five types of agency/structure interrelations, the interviews covered a wide range of situations which can be ascribed to:

- type 1, characterised by stability, limited agency and poor learning and career opportunities;
- type 4, including dynamic situations as far as agency and learning and career opportunities are concerned, in working areas not typical of the knowledge-based economy and society;
- type 5, also including dynamic agency/structure situations, largely inside work and life conditions which are typical of the knowledge-based economy and society.

Types 2 and 3, are not present in the cases collection. They relate to unstable work situations of both low-skilled/low-educated especially in middle or older age range and more educated young people still in precarious conditions in the labour market. Such types are not present as the rules established for the interviewees' identification excluded them from the range of acceptable cases. In particular, the rules related to having had a stable work experience of at least five years in the same context and to holding an average intermediate level education qualification. Further research should be devoted to such critical social strata.

As already stated the above types have of course to be taken only as ideal types, allowing an easier and more effective treatment of the research material. The cases have been ascribed to the types as follows:

- type 1. (here renamed as cluster C): three cases: Aurelia, Loredano, Mina.
- type 4. (here renamed as cluster B): nine cases: Diana, Elisabetta, Emiliano, Gianni, Lucia, Mercuzio, Roberta, Romano, Sara.
- type 5. (here renamed as cluster A): nine cases: Adelia, Alberto, Berta, Hanna, Irma, Italo, Masuccio, Paloma, Tatiana

The prevalence of type 5 and 4 in the cases collection is not only due, of course, to the selection rules, but also to the higher interest of such types from the viewpoint of transitions and the effects of learning on them. People in these types display a much wider range of agentic behaviour and reflection/reflexivity in relation to their more complex structural conditions.

The analysis is carried out in such a way that it allows taking comparatively into account the most interesting issues related to the three clusters, according to the following scheme.

	Cluster A	Cluster B	Cluster C
Contextual rules and resources in terms of knowledge and learning			
Individual conducts and the role of learning			
Individual conducts and relevant transitioning factors			
Capabilities for transformative learning			
Learning and self-identity construction			
Learning and competencies development			
Reflexivity types and career decision-making styles			

Of course, the degree of permeability between the different clusters is very high. For instance, Gianni is a TV director who could be in many ways considered as belonging to a highly knowledge-based activity area, but the quality of his work contents and relations has been progressively downgraded over time and he is de facto placed in a role in which neither cognitive nor social competencies are those typical of a knowledge worker. Even his self-employment status can be easily equated to the one of a stable collaborator kept in a condition of non-hiring, due to his exclusive engagement with a single client (a major broadcasting TV channel). He represents a situation more typical of cluster B than of cluster A.

Analogously, Roberta's educational and experiential background (as a marketing professional) could be easily classed within cluster A, but her choices pushed her in a way of living and working more typical of cluster B. Furthermore, the three cases in cluster C, in which stable and non-innovative agency/structure relations are typified, come from very different starting points and their placement in that type of agency/structure relations is a consequence of life circumstances (in particular linked to health problems).

Therefore, clusters A, B and C are not at all closed in themselves. They are mostly built up with reference to the interviewees' present positions but to allow a perspective stance through which it would be possible to retrace the threads of different individual dynamics at the crossroads of agency and structure.

Three iconic cases can facilitate the distinction of the three clusters:

- case 1: Alberto, software technician;
- case 2: Lucia, seamstress/stylist;
- case 3: Loredano, employee in a public administration.

2.4.2. Case analysis

2.4.2.1. Contextual rules and resources

Different environments

The reference structure of those included in cluster A can be seen as articulated into three sub-types. The first one is constituted by labour markets and working environments of middle level professionals within industrial and service companies at middle-high levels of technological development and economic vitality. At least four of the research protagonists are confronted with such kind of contextual structure. In one of the cases, the subject is employed in an enterprises' representation body but, in terms of his cultural attitudes and learning development approach, he is perfectly aligned with those employed in companies (his organisation is structured like a company and culturally homogeneous to it).

A basic requirement for people living and working within this kind of structure is of course constituted by a good professional standing, supported by the educational background of a university degree ⁽¹⁰⁾ or even, at the lower edge of the cluster, of a technical school diploma. Even for higher positions, however, formal education is only one of the requisites for entering the company, while the internal career is regulated according to processes in which experiential learning is the most important factor. In general the structure offers different learning-based opportunities for individuals' promotion. In one of the cases, for instance, the internal career paths are reported as directly linked to the accumulation of knowledge in specific working areas and to the personal availability for tackling complex work-related learning issues in different areas.

Furthermore, the career paths within cluster A have scarce openings towards formal learning: the cases in which in-company training is provided are rare and those of training/re-training offered by the company in outside structures are rare as well. In-company training mostly takes the on-the-job form, supported by older colleagues.

⁽¹⁰⁾ The above mentioned interviewee working in the representation body does not hold a university degree, but he (who had a back and forth mobility path) was hired for the first time by that body about 20 years ago, when the lack of a degree were not an insurmountable obstacle.

No specific forms of guidance or placement have been used by interviewees, confirming that these kinds of structural opportunities are still at their beginnings in the Italian reality, where the first steps in the career path are almost invariably taken through direct contacts with companies. One of the cases represents in some way the exception that confirms the rule: the young professional was in fact hired, just right after her degree, by one of the few placement agencies operating in this country and spent three years working in this field. Placement was for her a job not a way for finding a job.

For other cases included in cluster A the reference structure is constituted by the rules and resources typical of middle-high level self-employment (even in the form of micro-entrepreneurship). The market – be it constituted by companies, like in the case of the micro-enterprise for solar energy, or by individual clients/consumers, like in the case of the wine promotion centre – requires continuous attention to customers' needs, to technological innovation and to a multiplicity of converging factors (concerning fiscal matter, payment of collaborators, use of infrastructures, etc.) which directly influence the business trends and survival.

However between the first and the second sub-type of cluster A the boundaries are very open. The passages from working in a company to working as self-employed and vice-versa are absolutely the norm: both structural conditions seem regulated by the same kind of learning requirements and knowledgeability dynamics. The difference consists in the fact that the consequences of individual action are more immediately perceivable for self-employed, while the organisational condition still represents a mediating shelter and at the same time a stronger constraining factor as far as individual initiative is concerned.

In cluster A two cases of creative professions in cinema and television are also included. In these cases the self-employment structure is particularly dynamic considering the accelerated pace of technological innovation and the crucial role played by interlocutors who have the power of providing work according to contingent market factors. In these cases technology can be seen as a very demanding set of resources in professional lives dominated by market rules. Therefore creative professionals' contexts are in the very end similar to the ones of professionals in other areas.

Different kinds of structural dynamics

The reference structure for cases included in cluster B can be also considered of a dynamic kind, but in a different sense than in cluster A. Dynamism in this kind of structure has less to do with high-level knowledge needed in work activities and with complex relations vis-à-vis the interlocutors (in the market or inside the organisation), while it is more linked to the speed at which things change in

economic settings, even at micro activities level, and with the corresponding need to keep a continuously positive attitude towards personal change and updating.

In this cluster, for instance, one of the cases is constituted by a woman who chose not to go ahead with the typical large company career and transitioned to a small company that needed her profile but for simpler tasks and lower compensation. Another example is provided by a self-employed/micro-entrepreneur woman who is doing well in her job but in a field – credit collection – in which long working time and feisty temper are the main assets. The iconic case of this cluster – at present teacher in a professional school of fashion and design – has a kind of experience that might be easily placed in cluster A, due to her familiarity with design technology and her past propensity towards mobility. But over time she decided – for family reasons – to partly downgrade her dynamism and to become a teacher, still exposed to innovation and creativity but in the simpler environment of rules and resources constituted by a vocational school.

In cluster C the structure surrounding subjects' working life is the one typical of traditional white-collar work (stability, dominance of physical structures and formal procedures, etc.). The framework reference is given by traditional lifelong employment, offering limited remuneration and the opportunity to conduct a linear life, scanned by predictable events culminating in retirement.

2.4.2.2. Individual conduct and the role of learning

Access to, and success in, education and learning

Careers and transitions in company and self-employment/micro-entrepreneurship environments within cluster A are based, as already underlined, on good professional standing continuously reinforced by experiential and work-based learning. Formal learning plays a very articulated role in this regard, with a clear-cut distinction between learning that takes place in educational channels on the one hand and from training initiatives on the other. Almost all interviewed subjects reported – and confirmed within the additional interviews – that they had good or excellent relations with the school and the university. What was learnt within the formal channels is generally considered as an important driver for further developments in life and career.

School and university are taken as generators of cultural visions, critical attitudes and even technical preparation which was revealed as essential for professional success. Such remarks are usually accompanied by a sort of a-posteriori re-contextualisation of the role played by education. In one case, for instance – the one of the solar systems entrepreneur, previously software programmer – the contents of university studies – degree in Law – have been

instrumentally used as a very good background for applications linked to a totally different specialisation – software programming for law firms – acquired through self-learning and work experiences in IT companies.

Education, in the final analysis, is deemed as highly important in general cultural terms and even on a more specific technical ground, but the individual conducts are first of all directed towards goals indicated by concrete experiences and shaped by the participation in specific work practices. As far as training is concerned, the extent to which people are involved in in-company or company-supported education and training activities, is very limited. Through the additional interviews it was possible to get a closer understanding of the reactions to some education and training activities that interviewees were involved in: in general such activities, when linked to cultural or behavioural development, seem to represent good stimuli for participants, not in terms of acquisition of substantive knowledge but as a means for critically reflecting on sectoral and company trends and for better focusing their own role.

Education and training activities more oriented on technical issues, on the other hand, seem to gather an even more significant appreciation, as opportunities for successful transitions and progress within organisational career paths. Technical training is represented as a specific means for professional development allowing the acquisition of knowledge which is valuable within the organisation or – in the cases of self-employment – for catching up with technological developments.

For the software technician represented as an iconic case of cluster A, the courses which certify the mastery of specific software programmes are also considered as a means for the improvement of personal knowledgeability and for gaining access to tasks that require a formal certification. The substantive side of training converges in this case with the formal side, i.e. the certification as such. Some courses are important even if the quality is poor but a certification is generated. This is why the software technician is ready to pay for such courses on his own account. Also self-employed media professionals are ready to buy training courses, even at a high price if needed. But in these cases quality comes first. The most important factor taken into consideration is the trainer's fame and appeal.

Individual developmental conduct in career paths is also largely fostered by self-learning freely and voluntarily chosen as an opportunity to keep in touch with the evolution of the professional world. Self-learning is an aware, planned, activity area in which professionals include readings (of technical and non-technical literature) and exploitation of the opportunities provided by the Internet. Self-learning represents in many ways the real key of individual developmental conduct, insofar as it connects formal knowledge acquisition and informal work-based learning. Personal and professional development stem in all cases from a

professional background in which learning is intrinsically weaved with curiosity, willingness to improve performances and specific work-related needs typical of knowledge-based environments.

Meanings of experiential learning

The individual conduct of those in cluster B are mostly inspired by simpler, pragmatically oriented, patterns and styles, although the interest for the learning sources as a driver of professional development is also sometimes present. In particular, the cases characterised by a craft orientation tend to keep some relationships with specialised sources (e.g. the stylist with the press in the field of fashion) and with general culture as well, always considered as an inspiration generator. In the self-employment/micro-entrepreneurship cases, conduct is generally not linked to specific learning attitudes, except those, even very well developed, which might be generically assumed as belonging to the experiential learning domain. Experiential has to do, in these cases, with a spontaneous attitude towards self-development, and with a 'learning by doing' approach nurtured by optimism, self-efficacy and simplified but not ineffective reasoning styles. In one case – the door-to-door seller – a significant advance has been represented by the learning of portable computer and tablet functioning for purposes of handling orders, stocks and clientele.

For these kinds of self-employed/micro-entrepreneurs a common approach to formal learning (education and training) is of an opportunistic nature: they learn just enough to solve practical problems. No valuable opportunities for professional training are looked for. In one case it has been observed that the micro-entrepreneur – the woman in credit collection – offers a form of practical, quick, instrumental training to her collaborators, but she does not go beyond technical instructions. However all micro-entrepreneurs went through compulsory courses (managed by public bodies and chambers of commerce) whose attendance is needed for getting licences. Some of them are pure formalities (e.g. course for being licensed as owner of food shop) while in other cases a certain content quality is required (e.g. certification for selling technical equipment).

Learning and difficult life circumstances

The three cases in cluster C are all characterised by the aware choice of getting a job below their level of qualification and outside the range of opportunities which might have been considered as fitting with their educational and experiential background. In one of these cases – the woman dealing with student affairs in the Italian branch of an American university – the search for a voluntary downgrading had a very traditional origin: the willingness of better conciliating work and family pressures. The previous transitions functioned as attempts of

world discovery by a person structurally inclined towards simple values and satisfactions.

In the other two cases the choices were motivated by health reasons. In the first one – the employees in a public administration assumed as the iconic case of this cluster – the progressive decay of sight faculties compelled this man towards the last of his numerous transitions through a special law procedure which assures jobs to protected categories (the disabled). In the second one – the employee of an international elementary school – the part-time position she holds allows a small income that integrates a public welfare support provided to those who suffered and are still at risk of aggressive forms of cancer. After a very busy and differentiated professional life, this person had to radically restructure her work engagement and life style.

2.4.2.3. *Individual behaviour and relevant transitioning factors*

Types of transitions

Individuals in cluster A tend to show a significant propensity towards change. Their conduct is relatively braver in comparison to those in the other clusters due to both agentic reasons (i.e. higher levels of self-confidence linked to higher education and experience) and structural reasons (i.e. work contexts allowing more experience and offering opportunities for positive changes). The cases' analysis confirms a strict correlation between agentic and structural reasons.

In several cases changes are both of a breakthrough type and of an incremental nature. Considering some breakthrough examples, the iconic case of cluster A, for instance, passed from industrial chemistry to the ITC sector, where he initiated a career path which required several passages and continuous acquisition of new knowledge and abilities within the computerised network systems field. The video-maker, an expert in inter-cultural relations, spent a significant part of her working life as an employee in an embassy, then, when the choice for a new life direction emerged, she step by step created a specific new career path. The wine expert had a professional past in a completely different area (computer programming) but is now completely inside the new trajectory which continuously requires small restructurings and refinements. The woman at present engaged in solar systems, for instance, did not hesitate to embark herself in this adventure as soon as she discovered that photovoltaic energy represented a rich new market in which she could put to the test the initiative and relational abilities acquired when working in computer programming and website construction.

But also in the cases in which changes are less drastic, the inclination towards improvement through transition is evidently present. The case of the accounting specialist shows, for instance, that a clear-cut decision has to be

taken when a new opportunity appears at the horizon and that even a company internal career requires choices and personal availability for different forms of engagement.

The individual behavior of those having a clearer orientation towards self-employment are of course more open to risk and more oriented to the search of opportunities wherever they can be seized. For those who have chosen the company way, transitions are pushed by a relatively higher motivation to get a good salary and to acquire more stable work situations through individual knowledgeability gains (the best shield against recurrent organisational transformations). In some cases the statuses of employed and self-employed are rather interchangeable, as shown by the case of the quasi-manager in the big energy company, coming from a consultancy and open to getting back to that work area. For him mobility is the norm while the permanence in a looser situation can be highly dangerous for a career construction based on success and reward. Transitions are highly strategic in these kinds of cases; they are directly used as means for progressively acquiring more market value and/or for avoiding situations in which such a value can be endangered.

These type of cases seem to show that fateful moments can be better faced when the agency/structure correlation is favourable for the subject. Being downgraded in a company evaluation or even fired can be subjectively taken as challenging conditions that can be faced through accrued engagement and self-valorisation of experiences and capabilities. In parallel, however, there are cases in which the even correlation can be drastically altered by unexpected events, like in the case of one of the two creative professionals in cinema and video, Tatiana, whose professional life has been severely affected by a vertical breakdown in trust in others (because of the theft of important filmed materials of hers) and by a personal crisis linked to the lengthy illness of her aged parents.

Transitioning and self-management

Within cluster B behaviour seems to be driven by more prudent drivers. As already seen, for many cases in the sample the permanence in less dynamic activity sectors was an aware choice more than a necessity, in particular for women having to reconcile demands of work and family. Even in these cases, however, some levels of knowledgeability and value recognition at work are important. Lower dynamism in these cases does not mean closure regarding both structural factors pushing for change and personal, agentic drives towards improvement. The micro activity of the woman who transitioned to pastry-making, for instance, requires that she firmly keeps her finger on the pulse of her clients' desires. Knowing the clients and being able to interpret their tastes and inclinations is very important for her. Understanding people is a basic competence for her and can also be considered as a powerful transitioning

factor. Her transitions (from art events to other fashionable activities) have always been driven by her capacity of cultivating relational networks. Networks constitute the structure for her: an array of factors which enable opportunities for moving towards new activities, invented more than found in the labour market.

Another example is provided by the iconic case of this cluster, the seamstress/stylist who transitioned to training in a vocational school. She is perfectly aware that being up-to-date is relevant even in her last occupation, in which inputs from fashion trends and from technology must be continuously absorbed. In many ways she capitalised her abilities for continuous learning and updating as strength factors in her last job. But such abilities have been in fact the *fil-rouge* (red thread) of her entire professional development, kept in-tune with a very volatile environment.

The cases in cluster C show that voluntarily entering different structural patterns is not an easy choice, reflexively activated and requiring both emotional abilities (concerning the acceptance of a destiny outside the rails of normal trajectories) and specific social abilities (concerning the navigation through bureaucratic rules and resources and the re-interpretation of the social role). Fateful moments, which are very relevant in these cases, are faced through strategies of controlled withdrawal and aware repositioning.

2.4.2.4. *Capabilities for transformative learning*

Aware transformative learning

Using the lenses of transformative learning, the cases seem to confirm the importance of such kind of learning from experience. Transformations in the meaning perspective can occur within working lives when the protagonists are able to identify how their own assumptions (and preconceptions too) shape their courses of action and to introduce new perspectives in them.

An interesting example on this point is provided by one of the two creative professionals in cinema and video, Tatiana, whose life was changed by the proposal she received from a documentary-maker to follow him in the shooting of a video in Guatemala. She was inside a very different activity area at that time: she was a librarian, engaged in interesting innovation activities for the transformation of her library into a cultural centre. But she had a different educational background (a degree in visual arts) and deep interests in cinema. She was the right person for accepting the proposal for working in Guatemala but she was somehow not ready for it. In the interview Tatiana recognises that in such a fateful moment she had to re-interpret some of her basic assumptions. In particular – she felt at ease with being a librarian as she was inclined to think about herself as the daughter of a modest *petit-bourgeois* family, mostly good for a quiet job, at a certain distance from her inner interests or dreams. So she had

to reshape such basic assumption about herself and to re-discover her own capabilities. This way she found herself ready to jump to the new position. In parallel she was supported in her choice by the idea, coming from her university studies, of being an active protagonist of the mass culture, woven of communication acts, like making videos, also having important political impacts.

The kind of knowledge and attitudes acquired in the university was extremely formative from this viewpoint and constituted the main reference of her transformative learning shift. Even TV and cinema, which at present constitute her professional field are ideally part for her of the wider reality of mass culture, to be approached through a critical and quasi-political stance. This could be seen as the *fil-rouge* meaning crossing all her activities and transitions, which deeply influenced the formation of her professional identity and brought to the formation of specific skills and competencies.

Transformative learning and its surrounding structural conditions

Romano's case is interesting for showing that transformative learning effects can take place not only through aware intra-subjective changes but also in terms of agency/structure dynamics. In other words, self-reflexivity plays a very important role in shaping professional trajectories and job transitions but it is not to be seen as only driven by internal dispositions. In the interview Romano recognises that in his professional life he has always kept a self-reflexive and open stance regarding work (and life as well). He has always realised that his most important points of strength lay in his communication abilities, i.e. his abilities of talking to people and creating occasions for meeting, exchanging, knowing each other. But during the interview he admits that his strategies for the implementation of his endowments were weak or superficial. He thinks that his successful transformation into a sales agent, first inside a company and then on an autonomous basis, is the result more of others' willingness and/or simply of chance. He sees himself as if he had gone through different experiences that really reshaped his vision of himself and of the world but the learning was always somehow retarded and the role of others very relevant. For instance, he attributes great importance to the selection that he underwent for being hired as sales agent. It was the result of this selection that fully convinced him about the new identity to be adopted: it was a sort of a-posteriori transformative learning.

He recognises that he could have learned something more from his experiences, if only he had been more careful. Even his refusal of going ahead in his education path (as he dropped out very early from school) is seen as a unreflective choice, also due to a family structure which was not enough supportive for his orientation (needless to say there was also the lack of any structural arrangement in terms of school and vocational guidance). There is a limit, however, to such an attitude. For instance, when he felt badly treated by the

company in a difficult moment of his life (his father was dying and he was unable to show up at work regularly) he had a sort of negative insight about working and living in a large company and suddenly decided to transform his professional/social role into the one of a self-employed sales agent. Acceptance and refusal seem to be converging in his transformative learning.

2.4.2.5. *Learning and self-identity construction*

A successful case of self-identity construction

The reshaping of self-identity is a relevant trait of every transition, more or less intense in relation to its nature (breakthrough or incremental). Such a reshaping has very much to do with the long-term effects of transformative learning, linked to emerging fateful moments or disorienting dilemmas. The case of Diana, one of the cluster B cases, is paradigmatic from this viewpoint. When young she had no specific inclination: she attended an artistic high school simply to avoid harder programmes. Then she developed a certain interest for the administrative work because of the simple fact that her husband had created a micro-business in the field of electrical plant building and she had to look after the back-office of his activity, side by side to her parental duty as mother of two children. She was able to learn a lot experientially, interacting with the accountant and the lawyer, up to the point of desiring to enroll in university: something she would have never imagined to do before. In fact she attended two years at the Law department at La Sapienza University in Rome.

But then things took a dramatic turn for her: she left the university because of her third pregnancy and right just after the birth the couple broke up in a bad manner. She found herself in a condition of real risk, having to think about three children and nobody to really trust in relation to the kids – and her own – exigencies. Almost casually, after experience of very precarious occupations, she found a job with a credit collection agency and step by step re-constructed herself around the profile of expert in this field. She had ups and downs, in the main she did not get along with the company-head, she changed company, she came back: but she was able to keep developing and to build-up a new career and professional identity.

After five years of work in that agency she was able to create her own business, just with the help of her older daughter (aged 19) and afterwards of an IT professional willing to find a different working area. The self-identity construction as micro-entrepreneur was not only a matter of hard work. What she told during the interview shows that she was careful in constantly creating a specific self-accountability of her courses of action. She reflected over time on her experience and developed aware visions on how to carry on a kind of work that has many unpleasant aspects but whose effectiveness in the very end stems

from the ability of putting into play approaches which can also be based on understanding, empathy and ethics. She kept high the level of the relationships with her clients (companies that need to recover sums of money from debtors) through the construction of an image of herself and of her micro-business as knowledgeable and reliable.

An unsuccessful case of self-identity construction

Those of self-identity construction, as already underlined, are not at all linear and easy processes. In many cases the puzzles linked to such processes remain unresolved and no plausible solution can be found to the problem of initiating sustainable identity trajectories. Mercuzio, another one of the cluster B cases, is an example of a never-ending attempt to build-up an enduring professional identity. His story is full of attempts and, paradoxically, even of some successes. His educational path started from a very humble professional certification, then arrived to a very strange kind of high school diploma, then eventually to a university degree in Humanities, with a major in Art History (at the University of Florence). As a worker he crossed several areas: having begun as a waiter in a coffee shop he deepened the 'secrets of coffee' accumulating a significant expertise in maintenance and repair of coffee machines. He was barman, sommelier and restaurant manager. He became designer (shoe designer for a middle enterprise in this field then for a smaller business). He tried to become a professional piano player.

Now he makes his living as night porter in a city hotel and is still looking for something that could satisfy his infinite quest for self-fulfilment and identity. He acknowledges that his frequent changes are a way to go along with his emotional waves, his agitation and instability, and even more so, he does not want to repress his drive towards a never-ending search. Learning has a crucial role in his story. He always tries to couple his passion for a given activity area with a preparation that could provide him with the intellectual means for managing such passion. For instance, he enrolled in university to acquire an adequate background (humanities and art) when he decided to evolve from shoe design to higher forms of design (in cooperation with his wife – at that time – who was an architect). His overall trajectory is constituted by continuous transitions; only the job as shoe designer in the company lasted for a reasonably long time, more than five years. An acceptably sustainable self-construction was probably hindered by the prevalence of the Self in the construction, whereby the latter implies in many ways a sort of renunciation to the most extreme pretensions of the former. What is particularly interesting from the project viewpoint is that in a case of this kind an over-dynamic agency seem to enact rather receptive structural conditions, allowing the subject's professional development, up to the interruptions due to his internal dispositions.

2.4.2.6. *Learning and competence development*

Developing competencies through education and training

Career paths are by definition linked to learning and competence development. Every work experience brings in itself learning opportunities and occasions for enriching the professional, cognitive, social and emotional endowments possessed by the protagonist of such an experience and brought to the next experience, even in a very different context. Of course, processes of learning and competence development differ a lot from case to case in nature and intensity: some entail a radical reshaping of individual capabilities, self-identity and knowledgeability factors, while some others, at the opposite extreme, are weak and messy.

A common trait of cases in cluster A is that the interviewees had a full awareness that competencies have to be continuously cultivated during the career course. Working and constructing competencies, from this viewpoint, are part of a continuum in which it seems possible to identify the positive correlation between formal education and training and professional competence development.

As previously highlighted the IT technician, represented as the cluster A iconic case, used to attend different courses, even if they were not particularly relevant in terms of content, as such attendance could testify to the up-dating of his professional competencies and allowed him to access programmes and equipment otherwise precluded to him. Other cases show a closer attention to the practical outcomes of formal learning experiences. In some cases these two aspects seem to go hand in hand. The case of Berta, for instance, is paradigmatic of how a training experience can contribute to the reinforcement both of the professional standing and of the self-identification in a given career path.

Berta, working in the marketing area of a furniture enterprise, attended a two-year course (1200 hours) in marketing and international trade, offered by a well-known training center in Emilia Romagna, specialised in technical training for SMEs. Before this course Berta was, paradoxically, appreciated by the firm for her general non-specialist background (of East European languages and literature) and for her fresh attitude to work issues, allowing her to generate solutions that people with more consolidated resources were unable to provide. The firm appreciated her being a mould-breaker and that she was able to propose new ideas. The 1 200 hours course was a relevant chance for her: she learned a lot and developed ideas for new products addressed to the Slavonic world. This way Berta was eventually invited to take the place of a marketing director, who represented an old-fashioned way to represent furnishing. Subsequently, when she left the furniture company, she used a lot of the

previously acquired professional competencies, mixing them with the other outcomes of her experience. In particular, having voluntarily downgraded her professional profile (accepting positions as an employee or as a consultant to different SMEs) she realised how important it was to sell herself as a holder of competencies in which marketing constituted the backbone of wider knowledge and abilities.

Developing competencies through experience

In all cases the interviewees identified experience as the crucial source of their own development. Within an ideal ranking, experience invariably comes first, while general education is acknowledged as a relevant factor, then training is recognised as having some kind of importance.

The latter – as already seen – can have a useful instrumental function. General education is mostly esteemed for the opportunities it provides in terms of enhancement of cognitive-cultural abilities (i.e. being able to see a given problem with a wider frame; being able to understand the background of phenomena, etc.), which are always considered as very important by those interviewed independently of their specific activity. Experience, in its turn, plays the fundamental role of matching theory and practice, individual dispositions and contextual affordances, understanding of the subtleties of a specific job and understanding the direction of a career through a sequence of jobs.

The main competencies to be activated through experience are of a social and emotional nature. As clearly stated by Berta, working experience can be successful only if it is formative of human qualities. She refers about her experience as one of learning through the interplay between the cultivation of specific knowledge on the one hand, and interpersonal relationships on the other. Some human qualities, from this viewpoint, appear more important than anything else. Developing these human qualities is the pre-condition for doing any type of job. Technical skills are generally available in organisations: the problem is that the people who possess them do not necessarily know how to use them, how to interact and communicate to reach a goal. Possessing technical competence is important but alone this is a far cry from actually being able to use it to obtain useful results.

In the above terms, 'human' (i.e. social and emotional) competencies are seen as a general background to be put in place in all working activities and transitional situations. But for many interviewees such competencies are considered as per-se useful objects, mostly when the career is based on social relations, like in the cases of those working in sales and in creative domains. For some the recognition of the importance of such competencies took the form of a discovery. Romano, for instance, after a long time in a sales job that he deemed to be boring and tiresome, realised that interacting with clients of different ages

and conditions was in the very end rewarding. He understood that even humble work in deliveries can be the starting point for higher level tasks in terms of both performance in sales and satisfaction in relations. This was the starting point for a new phase in his working life, in which he re-constructed himself as a salesman, passing through a different step of awareness and initiative.

For others, the development of social competencies has always been part of a conscious strategy. Elisabetta, for instance, who spent most of her working life in open-air markets, considers the ability to be in tune with very different kinds of people and environments as an integral part of her competitive advantage and even for her personal wellbeing. In very different contexts, art galleries and high quality, creative, pastry-making, Sara spent a significant amount of her time on the development of personal/professional relationships and informal networks. She has an awareness of her emotional intelligence, claiming herself capable of observing people, feeling their emotions and tuning in very easily with herself and others.

Reflexivity types and professional decision-making/transitioning styles

Reflexivity is a recurring theme within the analysis of cases. Trajectories, choices, shifts from one path to another can all be seen as reflective/reflexive issues, which in many ways mediate between agentic dispositions and structural patterns of opportunity and threads. Of course reflexivity is a faculty or attitude not at all homogeneously distributed in the different cases. The already briefly discussed Archer's typology (Section 2.1.4.) helps very much in distinguishing relevant features which pertain to them.

In cluster A the autonomous reflexive type is predominant. The company workers' cases, such as those of Alberto, Adelia, Berta and others within the company and self-employment sub-clusters show the typical traits of a well-established autonomy. They can be easily brought back to characteristics such as those related to 'acting on the basis of their own ideas, although being able to get information and advice from the others', 'being keen on devising appropriate action strategies', 'feeling at ease in mobility situations', 'being individualistic, often opportunistic'.

Within cluster A it is also possible to clearly identify the meta-reflexive type. The cases of the video-makers (Tatiana and Irma, who also went towards further professional development) can both clearly be included within this type. They can be easily identified as 'mostly interested in ultimate goals and values'; 'involved in civil society and social movements'; 'less motivated in circumventing constraints and getting opportunities and more in changing both them'.

Within cluster B some autonomous reflexives are also present. Diana, for instance, the credit collector, is an excellent representative of this type due to her evident focus on concrete outcomes and her determination in pursuing her

concrete work and life objectives. In cluster B also present are the communicative reflexive types characterised by traits such as: 'considering relationship as the crucial issue in work and more generally in life', 'tending to continuously confront their ideas with circles they belong to (family, friends, colleagues: people in a 'contextual continuity', having similar experience, views, perspectives)', 'forming life strategies in close connection with the feed-backs and responses they get from such circles'. Some of those interviewed, like for instance, Romano, the salesman, or Roberta, the marketing expert, could be considered as showing some of these traits, although for very different reasons and both are totally outside the stereotype of the dependent person.

For the rest of those included in this cluster the label 'communicative reflexive' is highly problematic. Cluster B includes some women who gave the priority to family imperatives. Their behaviour, however, does not necessarily fall within the communicative type, as their actions were linked not to personal dispositions but to very specific, even dramatic, needs (generally linked to divorce) pushing the woman to quit her projects and to prioritise finding the means of survival. Only in one case, here included in cluster C – Aurelia's case, having a clerical role in a private university – is the attribution to the communicative type indisputable.

Concerning the fractured reflexive type (including those who frequently fail their courses of action and are unsure about their position in society and in work systems), it is well represented by the cases of Mercuzio and Gianni. The former transitioned through several different activities within different sectors and now parked himself in the job of hotel night porter, still dreaming new professional adventures. The latter had a career in different television channels as an author and director of short programmes; but due to his emotional inability, he is at present confined in roles and relations that he dislikes while, in a rather consolatory way, he tries to prove himself as a writer of novels. Cluster C is composed by two cases which both had clear traits of autonomy but who had to surrender their aspirations because of health problems, transferring (downgrading) their potential in different life conditions.

Besides the analysis carried out through the above typology, other considerations can be put forward on the basis of the interpretation framework that Bimrose and Barnes (2008) produced having regard to different professional decision-making styles, or transitioning styles when the decisions are about the individual trajectory within different job positions. The evaluative and opportunistic styles seem prevalent in the project's Italian sample. Many of the cases, in both the dominant clusters, tend to show attitudes which might be described as evaluative insofar as they use self-reflection, are based on emotional as well as practical considerations, tend to understand the consequences of their decisions and aim at integrating self-learning in future

behaviour. Alberto, Berta, Lucia – just to mention those who expressed themselves more clearly about these kinds of issues – are good examples of such evaluative styles. As far as the opportunistic type is concerned, one can recall the attitudes of many respondents, well represented by Emiliano. The latter is a very interesting case of a clever observer of his surrounding reality, always ready to jump inside situations which could assure him a better living. In doing so he does not put into action specific strategic mechanisms; he is mostly guided by intuition and even by self-controlled emotional reactions (positive or negative) assumed as indicators of the need for change.

The strategic style – steadfastly focused on career goals and sustained by a firm belief on personal abilities to produce the desired outcomes – seems well represented by Masuccio who in fact calculates in a cold blood all his moves and interests, for instance being ready for strategic exits when the going gets tough for him. Diana appears as a case in between opportunistic and strategic, due to her ability to intuitively exploit the favourable chances in a given situation and to thoroughly pursue her established goals.

The aspirational style – hinging on the tendency to identify vaguely focused and distant goals – seems to have many points in common with the fractured type in Archer’s scheme. Mercuzio and Gianni can be assumed as examples of it.

Abbreviation list

CVET	continuing vocational education and training
SME	small and medium sized enterprise
VET	vocational education and training

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CHAPTER 3.

French national report

3.1. Contextual background of the French education and qualification system

3.1.1. French vocational education and training system – Its overall structure, functioning and policy instruments

The French education and training system (*système éducatif Français*) is composed of two interconnected and complementary systems: general education and VET (vocational education and training) systems. The general education system concerns comprehensive compulsory schooling (covering all segments of primary and lower secondary education) and some segments of upper-secondary and higher education not directly leading to professional qualifications (such as general baccalaureate at the end of upper secondary cycle, general bachelors' and research masters' degrees in higher education). As for the VET system, it plays an important role in connecting the latter to the world of employment and the production sphere through its increasing capacity of promoting practical skill development, professionalisation and learning path fluidity and complementarity within and between formal, informal and non-formal learning through various basic instruments as detailed below. It is composed of two interconnected and complementary systems: IVET (initial vocational education and training) and CVT (continuing vocational training). **Initial vocational education and training**

The initial vocational education and training (IVET) system is composed of three basic segments: school-based IVET, alternating training (*formation en alternance*) and specifically targeted training and accompaniment measures.

3.1.2.1. School-based IVET

The initial vocational education (IVE) is a school-based system in one of the two educational streams technological and vocational education undertaken at college and university levels.

At the upper secondary colleges (lycées), the vocational and technological education leads to the following qualifications:

- the vocational aptitude certificate (CAP) or a vocational studies diploma (BEP) at the end of a two- or three-year course. They allow their holders to have an easy direct access to the labour market;
- the final upper secondary college diplomas: the professional baccalaureate (Bac Pro) and the technological baccalaureate (BTn). They allow their holders to have access to higher education;

- the high technician diploma (BTS) is a three-year university level degree which prepared within the upper secondary colleges (*lycées*).

At the university and within the framework of EU standardised licence-master-doctorate regime (launched via the higher education reform of 2002) whose implementation was generalised during 2006, the vocational education leads to obtaining professional bachelor and master diplomas in all disciplines (engineering, electro-mechanics, chemistry, healthcare, construction, etc.).

3.1.2.2. *Alternating vocational training*

Alternating training (*formation en alternance*) is a dual system based on alternating periods of work and training within a private or a public organisation and an IVET provider. Although *alternance* is practically used in certain disciplines within the school-based IVET such as healthcare (nurses and doctors IVET), it remains however formally in the French context limited to two forms of alternance-based training: apprenticeship and professionalisation contract. This is basically due to the specificity of the trainee's contractual status at workplace (considered as an employee not as a student) (Dif, 2008; 2012).

Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship in France has its historical roots in the mediaeval guilds with their strict hierarchy of apprentices, journeymen and master craftsmen. Today apprenticeship which concerns basically young people aged from 16 to 26, is an alternation-based training between on-the-job training with an enterprise and off-the-job training courses within an apprenticeship centre (*centre de formation d'apprentis*) leading to the award of a vocational or technical training diplomas or an officially recognised title referenced within the NQF register (RNCP, national register for professional certifications). About 60% to 75% of the apprentice's contractual time is spent in on-the-job training within the enterprise. During this period, the apprentice receives a salary ranging from 30% to 80% of the national minimum guaranteed wage depending the apprentice's age and the length of time he or she has served under the apprenticeship contract. The follow-up of the apprentice is taken in charge by both a referent tutor at the apprenticeship centre and an apprenticeship master (*maître d'apprentissage*) at workplace (Dif, 2008; 2012).

Professionalisation contract

Like apprenticeship, the professionalisation contract (*contrat de professionnalisation*) is also a dual system based on alternation between on-the-job training (from 75% to 85% of the duration of the contract) and in-house training (15% to 25% of the contractual time) within a training provider such as apprenticeship centres. Following the National Interprofessional Agreement of 5

December 2003, the professionalisation contract was introduced through the 2004 *Act (of 4 May) on lifelong vocational training and social dialogue* as a substitute to the previous three vocational inclusion contracts (vocational qualification contract, vocational guidance contract and the vocational adaptation contract). It targets the professional integration or reintegration within the labour market of both young and old people, including those (mainly job-seekers) who are already living on the minimum social allowances ⁽¹¹⁾ provided by the public authorities. Its duration goes from six to 12 months, with a possible extension to 24 months, via sectoral agreement, according to the specific case of the beneficiary and/or the nature of the undertaken training. During this period, the beneficiary's receives a salary from the employer representing a percentage of the minimum guaranteed wage which goes from 55% up to 85% (and even beyond) depending on age and qualification level and sectoral bargaining agreements. The funding is provided by the OPCA (*organisme paritaire collecteur agréé*), an accredited funds collector and manger, obtained thorough the profesionalisation contribution of 0.5% of the overall payroll or 0.15% for firms with less than 10 employees. At the end of the professionalisation contract, the successful beneficiary is awarded, vocational qualification certificate (*certificat de qualification professionnelle*), a title or a qualification referenced by a collective agreement and registered within the NQF register (RNCP).

3.1.2.3. Other IVET specific measures

Other IVET specific measures are basically socio-vocational inclusion and accompaniment measures undertaken in favour of disadvantaged and/or low qualified people (mainly young job-seekers without qualifications) such as the second chance schools (*école de la deuxième chance*): 'the second chance schools provide vocational training and education to young people aged between 16 and 25 without professional qualifications or 'certification'. These schools deliver to young people at the end of the training a certificate specifying the attained level of competences in a way which facilitates their access to employment or to a certification referenced and registered within the national qualifications framework (French NQF)' (Article L214-14, Code of Education, modified by Article 38 of the Act n°2009-1437 of 24th November 2009) (Dif, 2012).

3.1.3. Continuing vocational training

Continuing vocational training (CVT) constitutes the second main segment of the French VET system. Since its formal introduction by the 1971 Act of 16 July

⁽¹¹⁾ Such as active solidarity income (RSA, *revenue de solidarité active*) for young people and a solidarity allowance (ASS, *allocation de solidarité spécifique*) for older people.

1971, it has undergone important extensions and enrichment concerning its instruments, functioning and active role of social partners and other involved stakeholders on enterprise level and on national, regional and sectoral levels. CVT concerns basically adults who are already (or just) embarked on their working life with aim of allowing them:

- to adapt continuously to the requirements of changing working techniques, conditions and transitions;
- to update or further develop the portfolios of their vocational skills and competences;
- to acquire further qualifications necessary for coping with transitions' requirements and for the development of their occupational identities, work-related functional and promotional flexibility/mobility in particular and socio-professional promotion in general.

At present the French CVT is composed of three basic components: employer-directed CVT (ED-CVT), employee self-directed CVT (SD-CVT), and the 'individual right to training' (DIF, *droit individuel à la formation*), which could be employee-directed or make use of employer training provision (Dif, 2008).

3.1.3.1. *Employer-directed CVT*

Employer-initiated and directed CVT (ED-CVT) constitutes the dominantly used instrument within the French CVT system. It is generally carried out within the framework of the vocational training plan of the organisation (private or public). It includes all kinds of short term and medium term vocational training decided and implemented by the organisation in favour of its employees. It is the result of a concerted action within the enterprise aiming at the promotion of internal functional labour flexibility and adaptability. For the enterprise, the training plan is usually financed through the firm's overall mandatory contribution (representing now an overall a minimum contribution of 1.6% of its total wage bill) to an OPCA, (acting on branch and regional levels) (Dif, 2008).

3.1.3.2. *Employee self-directed CVT*

Considered as the employee's choice and preference guided form of training, self-directed CVT is usually carried out via the following main formally institutionalised vocational training regimes.

Individual training leave

Officially introduced in 1971, CIF regime (*congé individuel de formation*) was designed to allow any worker in the private sector to take (over his/her working life) a paid leave (under minimum requirements adapted to the nature of work contract) to undertake self-initiated and directed training programmes independent of the organisation's training scheme with the guarantee of

maintaining the work contracts during the training periods. It was created to promote free choice and equal access to learning and training by introducing three interdependent guarantees (Dif, 2008; Gahéry, 1996; Guilloux, 1996):

- free-choice guarantee in terms of which the employee is free to choose any type of training programme outside the organisation's usual training scheme. The undertaken training can be vocational with various ultimate aims such as acquisition of higher qualifications for promotions and professional advancements/transitions, enhancing employability, job conversion and mobility, as well as for adaptation to changes in technology and labour market structures. The training programme can also be non-vocational with the aim of allowing the trainee to acquire general qualifications and/or to get more involved in the social and cultural life. The CIF duration is one year maximum, if the training is undertaken on full-time basis, and 1 200 hours in case of part-time training. This duration limit can be exceeded via collective bargaining agreement (within the sector or the enterprise);
- equal chance guarantee for having access to learning and training. Accordingly, all workers with different types of work contracts can benefit from it. Initially, CIF was designed and implemented exclusively in favour of workers recruited according to non-limited duration work contract. It took 20 years for this regime (after its introduction) to adapt to the situation of precarious employment. In December 1991, it was formally extended to include employees on fixed duration contracts and temporary workers. In the case of a full/part-time open-ended contract, the candidate to CIF has to justify accumulating (continuously or discontinuously) a prior working experience of two years of which 12 months within the last company. For a fixed-term contract, the candidate has also to justify two years of prior experience but accumulated over five years of which four months at least during the last year. As for employees working through temporary employment agencies, they need to justify only accumulating (continuously/discontinuously) a working experience of 560 hours of which 360 hours through the last temporary employment agency;
- autonomous funding and management guarantee: since 1984, CIF has been financed through a special funds held and managed by an OPCA, independent parity organism (Fongecif/Opacif). This fund is fed by a mandatory contribution (specific to this regime) from the employers representing 0.20% of the total amount of wages paid to their employees. During the training leave, the beneficiary employee receives his/her full salary as long as the letter is lower than the double of SMIC (the minimum guaranteed wage), otherwise the received salary will be within the range of 80% to 90% of the original salary. The other costs such as training cost, transport and accommodation can also be taken in charge partially or fully

by the OPCA (Fongecif/Opacif). Although in some cases the State can take in charge part of the training costs, its contribution remains however variable over time and generally limited to financing special cases of vocational training leave such as long term training leaves and the training leaves within small companies (with less than 10 employees).

Professional training leave

The professional training leave (CFP, *congé de formation professionnelle*) is equivalent to CIF scheme (used by the employees of the private sector). It is accessible by any employee within the public sector after accumulating three years of full-time working experience (or equivalent). Its maximum duration is 12 months (and three years maximum accumulated leaves over the whole career of the beneficiary). During the training leave the employer takes in charge the payment of 85% of the salary, including all training related costs. After the completion of training leave, the beneficiary has to work for the same institution for duration equal to three times the training leave period. In this sense, the CFP is more or less similar to payback clause training leave instrument.

Validation of acquired experience

The validation of prior experiential informal and non-formal learning (VAE, *validation des acquis de l'expérience*) is not a new notion for the French educational and training system. Its development has been a gradual process in scope and contents under different acronyms: validation for obtaining the grade of engineer in 1934 (Act of 10 July 1934); VAPP (*validations des acquis professionnels et personnels*) in 1985 with the aim of facilitating access to formal higher education, VAP (*validation des acquis professionnels*) in 1992 to cover all levels of professional qualifications and finally the VAE (validation of acquired experience, *validation des acquis de l'expérience*) introduced through the Social Modernisation Act (17 January 2002) to include, in addition to prior work-based learning, learning gained through social and cultural activities. As a formative and summative instrument, the VAE establishes the individual's right who has already accumulated (continuously and/or discontinuously) over three years (on full-time basis or equivalent) of any remunerated and non-remunerated working experience, in at least one activity related to the contents of the targeted type of qualification/certification to apply for an exemption in the required exam-units or modules (Dif et al., 2009).

The required prior experience does not include the periods of initial and continuing vocational education and training, traineeships/internships and any training periods connected with obtaining a qualification or a title. Thus the VAE allows a beneficiary (meeting this requirement) to get his/her prior experiential informal and non-formal learning assessed and validated (within a validation and

certification awarding institution) through a process leading to obtaining a vocational certification (qualification) or a title (at any level) referenced and registered within the NQF register (RNCP). The qualifications obtained through the VAE are the same as those obtained through the formal track (IVET system).

The procedure which guarantees a real access to VAE regime, in its last generalised version, is functioning through a succession of four basic stages (Dif et al., 2009). The first stage involves provision of Information and guidance. Any individual interested in VAE has direct access to many sources of information provision, guidance and even supervision on national and regional levels. In addition to documentation standpoints, repertories and websites connected with national government ministries and sector bodies, each academy, local authority and university on regional level is equipped, at least, with one VAE information and guidance provision department/centre and related website.

The second stage involves establishing the feasibility of the candidature. This stage consists of preparing and submitting an access feasibility administrative application to the selected institution for the targeted certification. This stage is designed to avoid committing candidates with highly reduced chance of success to go on with the remaining stages of the process. It is a three step process: pre-admissibility application preparation, pre-admissibility reviewing and justified feasibility decision.

The third stage embodies the candidate's portfolio preparation and accompaniment. This stage effectively allows the pre-admitted candidate to make explicit and analyse his or her prior experiences in a more formalised and structured way by preparing the VAE folder of the portfolio of acquired experiences and competences. From this stage onwards, the candidate is strongly advised to have an effective supervision or mentoring support from the VAE department within the validation institution.

The fourth stage relates to assessment, interviewing and validation. The assessment and validation process takes place at an accredited institution for this purpose, which is usually the certification delivery institution (such as the university). The assessment and validation are taken in charge by a jury which must be appointed and chaired in accordance with VAE related general regulations and with those specific to each type of qualifications. In general, a quarter of its members must be from the qualified representatives of the relevant occupational sector. Half of them must be representing employers and the other half has to represent employees with an equal gender balance. No member from the candidate's company is allowed to be a member of the VAE jury. They are also excluded from the VAE jury all the accompanying counsellors who helped the candidates to construct their VAE application portfolios.

The jury's role in this stage can be divided into three key steps:

- (a) analysis and assessment of all the information contained in the application file to identify the applicant's prior experiential knowledge and competences which comply with the requirements of the candidate's targeted certification;
- (b) interview: this allows for obtaining complementary information and clarifications from the candidate concerning his or her submitted portfolio of acquired experiences and competences;
- (c) deliberation and final decision-making: the VAE jury then proceeds to deliberation and takes one of the following final decisions: a full validation (and awarding related certification), a partial validation (some exemption units) or refusal to award the targeted qualification/certification (in this last case the validation process for the targeted certification stops, and the candidate might be re-directed to other educational or guidance instruments such as *bilan de compétences*).

The obtained VAE financing is dependent on the trainee's employment status. For employed individuals, there are three open possibilities:

- within the framework of employer-directed CVT: the employer's training plan usually for the employees of the public sector via undertaking for instance a CFP;
- within the framework of DIF scheme;
- within the framework of employee self-directed CVT for the private sector employees, usually through an individual training leave (CIF) or a VAE leave scheme (*congé VAE*), which are financed through a OPCA (Fongecif/Opacif).

Concerning unemployed/job-seekers there are two possibilities:

- employment pole (*pole emploi*) which manages unemployment insurance funds;
- regional authority (regional council).

As for self-employed individuals, VAE is financed by the training insurance fund collector and manager, FAF (*Fonds d'assurance formation des non-salariés*).

Competence audit (BC, *bilan de compétences*)

After a period of experimentation during the second half of the 1980s, the non-formal competence audit regime (BC, *bilan de compétences*), was formally generalised to all remunerated and non-remunerated individuals (including unemployed/job-seekers) at beginning of the 1990s. The competence audit established the individual's right to have a voluntary access to personnel and professional assessment and guidance with aim of coping with work/learning transitions and defining a clear professional or training project for future developments. As a formative and guidance instrument, the competence audit

does not lead to any formal recognition or certification but it might lead to undertaking a VAE.

To have access to the competence audit, the candidate has to justify a prior salaried regular activity of five years, of which one year within the last organisation. The individuals employed according to a fixed-term work contract, have to justify only two years of work experience within this period of five years (of which four months on the basis of fixed duration work contract). As for temporary employees, they need to justify five years within the profession of temporary work (of which 1 600 hours within the last organisation).

Employees' access to the competence audit is organised within the framework of CVT regimes as follows:

- within the employee self-directed CVT scheme: by taking a leave for competence audit (CBC, *congé de bilan de compétences*). It is financed through an OPCA (Fongecif/Opacif) for beneficiaries on open-ended or fixed term work contracts and by FAF.TT (*Fonds d'assurance formation du travail temporaire*) for employees recruited through temporary employment agencies.
- within the DIF instrument (financed by the employer);
- within the employer-directed CVT scheme.

As for the unemployed individuals, the competence audit is accessed through employment agencies of *pôle emploi* and financed partially or wholly by the State or local authorities. The competence audit is organised within one of more than 921 institutions accredited as BC-centres (including CIBC, *centres interinstitutionnel de bilan de compétences*). The assessment process in itself is formally fixed by the 1992 implementing Degree. It goes through a succession of three individualised stages (Dif, 2008):

- (a) preliminary information and guidance stage which allows the CIBC to:
 - (i) collect and analyse the necessary information about the candidate's needs and commitment in the process;
 - (ii) inform rigorously the beneficiary about the competence audit process, its stages and the assessment methods and techniques used;
- (b) assessment stage, which allows the beneficiary to:
 - (i) analyse his or her motivations, personal and professional interests;
 - (ii) identify his or her personal and professional competencies (including general knowledge);
 - (iii) determine his or her project for professional development;
- (c) concluding guidance stage, which allows the beneficiary through an interview to:
 - (i) have access to detailed results of the assessment stage;

- (ii) identify the favourable and non-favourable factors for the construction of a professional or a training project, and predict/plan the principal steps of its implementation.

3.1.3.3. *Individual right to training (DIF)*

DIF is an individual right to training (CVT) open to any employee on open-ended duration contract (justifying at least one working year with the current employer) as well to any employee on a fixed duration contract (justifying four working months with the current employer during the last 12 months). The right to training is accessed (in both private and public sectors) at the initiative of the employee in consultation and agreement with the employer. The used credits in terms of durations are 20 hours per year and cumulative within the limit of 120 hours over six years. These accumulated training hours can be used for taking a leave for the validation of acquired experiential learning (CVAE, *congé VAE*) or a leave for competence audit (CBC, *congé BC*). So, the training is usually undertaken outside the enterprise and financially taken in charge by the employer. The employee's accumulated training hours are also transferable from one company to another under certain conditions such as redundancy, business closure or restructuring. DIF priorities and aims are defined in general terms through the article L.9003-3 of labour code as follows: professional promotion training actions; training actions for the development of the employee's knowledge and qualifications.

The main overarching rationale for the introduction of the individual right to training by the Act of 4 May 2004 on lifelong vocational training acts as a development which is half-way between employer-direct CVT and employee self-directed CVT (ESD-CV). Hence it operates to promote complementarity between the other two basic components of the CVT system by reducing some observed biases in their functioning by as a half-way training regime. The dominant employer-directed CVT was perceived as biased towards the employer's priorities and interests, while the previous employee-initiated and directed CVT regime was regarded as favouring the personal and professional priorities and interests of the employee. The new act was therefore designed to reconcile the two competing interests with provision more finely balanced between the previous two regimes.

As a universal instrument, any legally working employee in France (national or a foreigner) meeting access requirements to DIF instrument can automatically benefit from it.

3.1.4. **French national qualification framework (French NQF)**

All qualifications acquired through the French education and training system (including the VAE) are referenced and registered (according to the five-level

classification grid of 1969) within the NQF repertory (RNCP) held, updated and managed by the National Commission for Vocational Qualifications (CNCP, *Commission National des Cerifications Professionnelles*). The referencing of this level-classification grid (which classifies individuals according their job-profiles and acquired qualifications within the French NQF) to European qualifications framework (EQF) was completed by October 2010 as follows (Dif, 2010):

- (a) NQF level 5 (= EQF level 3): workers and employees who hold jobs which normally require a level of VET qualifications equivalent to the vocational aptitude certificate (CAP) or the vocational studies diploma (BEP) (two years of vocational schooling beyond the first cycle of secondary education). Their activity consists mainly of executing a set of job-related tasks with autonomy within the limits of related use of techniques and tools and/or under the responsibility of a qualified team leader in the domain. As the French vocational qualification system is a certification-based system (after the completion of comprehensive compulsory education), there are no formal qualifications within the French NQF lower than level 5 (= EQF level 3). This is why the French NQF is called *cadre national de certification* (CNC) and the EQF *cadre européen de certification* (CEC);
- (b) NQF level 4 (= EQF level 4): team leader, technicians and highly skilled workers who hold a technological baccalaureate (BTn) or a professional baccalaureate (Bac Pro), a technician (BT) or a vocational certificate (BP). This qualification level requires more theoretical knowledge than in NQF level 5. Their job-related activity is mainly technical work, which can be executed with autonomy and/or supervisory and coordination responsibilities;
- (c) NQF level 3 (= EQF level 5): high technicians and supervisors with a qualification level corresponding to the baccalaureate plus a two-year higher education level (120 ECTS). This includes the holders of the two-year university diploma in technology (DUT) and the high technician diploma (BTS). The NQF level 3 corresponds to a higher level of knowledge and capacities which does not include mastering the scientific foundations of the concerned domains. However, the required skills and knowledge at this level have to allow for undertaking related autonomous conception, supervisory and management responsibilities;
- (d) NQF level 2 (= EQF level 6): personnel (usually with middle management expertise) possessing a qualification level through education and training equal to bachelor's degree (*Licence*: L3 = 180 ECTS). At this level, the professional activity undertaken by an employee or a self-employed individual is based on mastering the basic scientific foundations of the profession in the concerned domain, leading generally to autonomy and responsibility in carrying out this activity;

- (e) NQF level 1 (= EQF level 7 or 8): personnel (executives, engineers, researchers, managers, experts, etc.) possessing a qualification level equal or higher than the master's degree (baccalaureate plus five-year, or more, higher education levels). This includes:
 - (i) master's degree (two-year Master degree level: M2 = 300 ECTS) corresponding EQF level 7;
 - (ii) doctorate (480 ECTS), corresponding to EQF level 8.

All the certifications awarded through the French NQF are also classified into three basic categories according to their delivering bodies (Dif, 2010):

- (a) national vocational certifications and titles awarded under the name of the State (by different ministries) and created on the basis of the decision undertaken by the advisory bodies (such as the professional consultative commissions). They are automatically incorporated in the NQF repertory (RNCP);
- (b) vocational qualification certificates (*certificats de qualification professionnelle*): They are sectoral or cross-sectoral certifications created and developed by the sectors under the responsibility of social partners. Their registration (for five years) within RNCP is requested by the concerned sector bodies and approved by the National Commission for Vocational Qualifications (CNCP);
- (c) certificates and titles delivered by Chambers, public or private institutions under their own names: they are registered within NQF repertory (RNCP) at request and after the approval of the CNCP.

3.1.5. Role of social partnerships in the development and functioning of the French VET and qualification system

Social partners and other directly involved stakeholders play a crucial consultative and decision-making role in the development and functioning of the French VET and qualification system (including the design and the renovation of qualifications and their referential standards). Their role is undertaken through collective agreements (including parity governance and management in connection with the implementation and financing of VET policy measures) on several interconnected levels: national inter-professional, sectoral, regional and company levels. The regionalisation of VET networking was launched by the decentralisation Act in March 1982 and July 1983 (completed by the five-year government-regional planning agreement of December 1993). This law and its complementary agreements transferred direct competences and responsibilities to the regional communities (accompanied by a handover of the appropriate financial means) in CVT and IVET.

Additionally, a regional employment and vocational training coordination committees (made up of regional State representatives, regional assemblies,

management and labour organisations, and regional chambers of agriculture, commerce and industry) were set up in 2002 with the aim of promoting and coordinating VET related policies and actions (Dif, 2006; 2008).

VET regionalisation was also reinforced by the development of work-related learning partnership networking effective practices between enterprises, training providers, social partners and other stakeholders, namely through (Dif, 2006): work learning partnership networks between the enterprises and their training providers basically through alternating training contracts (such as apprenticeship, professionalisation contract and other alternating traineeship contracts) and networks connected with the implementation of VAE and competence audit regimes on regional level.

Work learning partnership network between the enterprises through the GEIQ networks (i.e. the groupings of employers for inclusion and qualifications). There are today in France about 103 groupings of GEIQ network distributed in 21 regions where 3 300 companies, primarily SMEs, are actively involved.

Cross-border interregional cooperation and partnerships between companies in VET (integrating within the framework of Interreg community initiative launched in the 1990s by the European Commission) with Euregio certification (Euregio training schemes) as exemplified by the case of tri-national training programme network between France, Germany and Switzerland (Dif, 2006). Concerning cross-border employment, 330 000 workers residents in France were estimated to cross the border every day, in 2010, as frontier workers in the neighbouring countries, mainly to Switzerland (135 000) (Cf. *espace transfrontalier*)

3.1.6. Secondary vocational education in France

A recent development in France has been the reorganisation of training cycles in secondary vocational education, which takes place after the ninth grade (*classe de 3ème*). According to the former regulation, to be admitted to professional baccalaureate (Bac Pro) studies (two years) one first had to complete a two-year programme leading to a vocational studies diploma (BEP) or sometimes a certificate of vocational aptitude (CAP). This meant that it took a total of four years to achieve a Bac Pro. This was considered to be not quite fair in comparison to the other courses because all other Bacs (general, *général*, and technological, *technologique*) took only three years after the ninth grade and continue to do so. Now all Bac Pros can be completed in three years.

This is an interesting development in that the systems which allow students following a vocational track in upper-secondary education (and/or prior to entry into higher education) to take longer to prepare for entry into higher education (Austria, the Netherlands in the past, parts of the UK system in the past) have tended to lead to more successful completions at degree level. The reason for

this is presumably as well as developing practical skills, knowledge and understanding the students were able to remediate any gaps in their academic skills before entry into higher education programmes.

At the same time BEPs are almost completely abolished, and CAPs now exist in two versions. The first version is identical with the previous one and remains vocationally oriented. Its target group are trainees who do not wish or are not able to attain the Bac level and who wish to enter the labour market. The second version has been reorganised as an intermediate certificate with a propaedeutic function in that it provides an introduction to the knowledge required for a vocational area as a prelude to subsequent programmes leading to proficiency. The learners are either obliged to take it at the end of their second year (in case they study at a school) or can take it on a voluntary basis (if they undergo an apprenticeship). However, the candidates can proceed to the third year of studies even when they have failed in the examination. The changes are shown in the figure below.

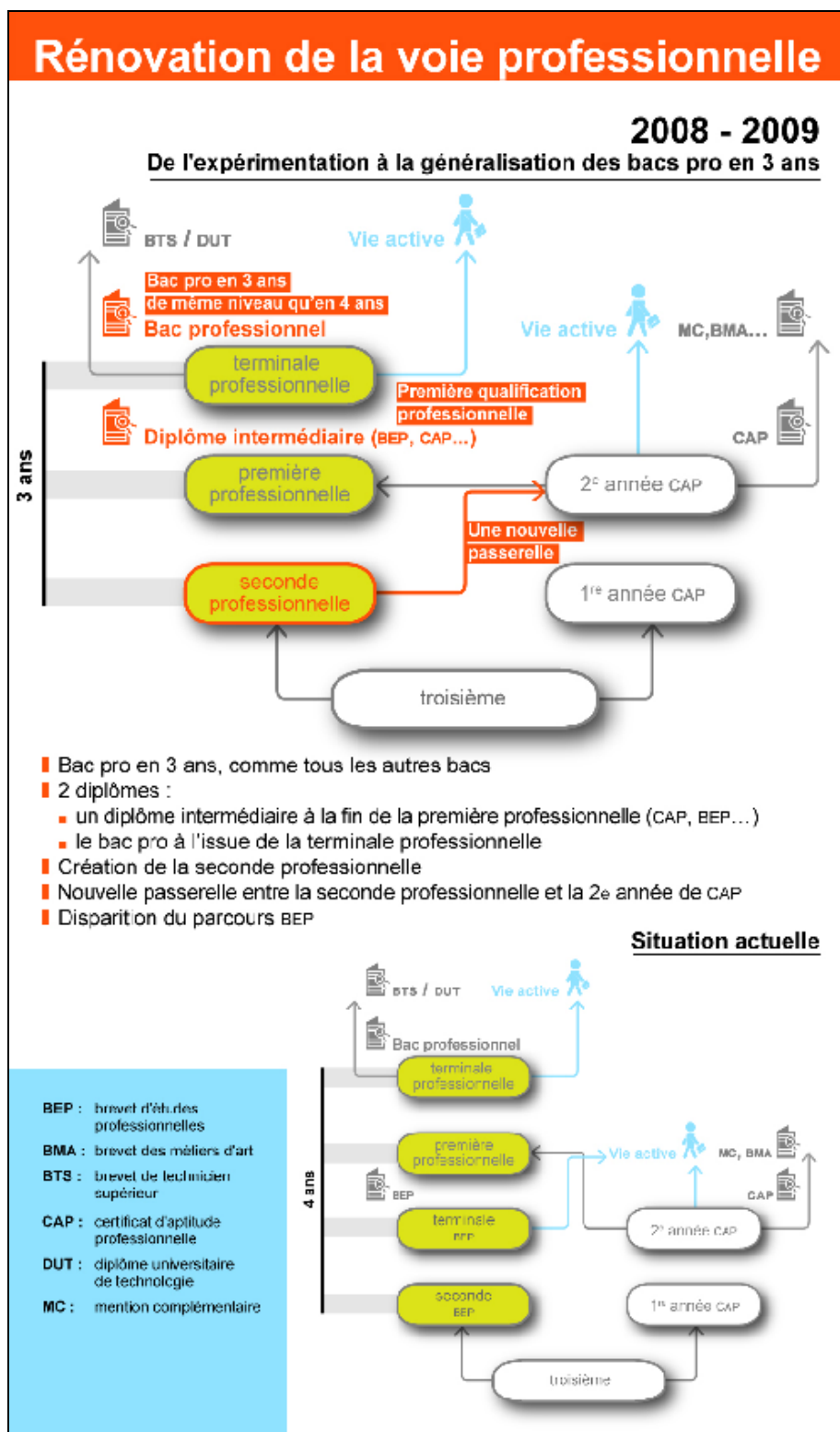
The reform concerns only the organisation of the courses. The tasks and responsibilities for which the diploma is supposed to qualify (the target occupation) remain unchanged. The reference profiles (*référentiels d'activité professionnelle*) on which the certification is based remain the same. What have changed are the teaching curricula (four year programmes have been restructured into three years).

Notwithstanding this reform the Bac Pros retain their position in the French NQF. They are assigned to level IV, together with other baccalaureates. According to the principles of the system this level gives access to higher education.

Since 1969 the French qualifications system has been organised in five levels, which are arranged in reverse order compared to the European qualifications framework (EQF). The national working group responsible for the referencing of the two frameworks show the following correspondence ⁽¹²⁾ in the figure below.

⁽¹²⁾ Groupe de travail français du project, 2010.

The reorganised French vocational education system



Draft referencing of the French NQF to the EQF

NQF (FR)		EQF
Level I (doctorate)	→	8
Level I (master)	→	7
Level II (bachelor)	→	6
Level III	→	5
Level IV	→	4
Level V	→	3
Not applicable		2
Not applicable		1

The system is designed in such a way that formal transition points exist for moving (vertically) from one level to another but also (horizontally) within one level. To allow for a validation of experiential learning (VAE) all qualifications in the NQF were divided into certification units. The purpose of these units is to facilitate the attainment of the full qualification, which can take place at once or progressively.

Qualifications such as CAP, Bac Pro, BTS may be completed within the framework of an apprenticeship contract (apprentissage). The bachelor degrees are situated at level II of the French NQF and level 6 of the EQF. Like the BTS, they are subject to the ECTS. It appears as if there is a continuum of qualifications, a ‘ladder’ that would allow for permeability. From a formal perspective the Bac Pro does gives access to university, but official statistics reveal that despite this formal permeability the participants who have completed a Bac Pro seldom proceed to a BTS course. Even in vocational areas like aeronautics the selection mechanisms at vocational schools in favour other types of the baccalaureate: 86% of the students in the aeronautical BTS course have a technology-oriented Bac STI (*sciences et techniques industrielles*, industrial science and technology), 10% have a general Bac S (scientifique) and only 4% come from the Bac Pro track ⁽¹³⁾.

Permeability is limited by the fact that all programmes that belong to the level of university education (BTS, Licence Pro) include a large proportion of theoretical contents for which Bac Pro students are not adequately prepared.

⁽¹³⁾ <http://www.letudiant.fr/etudes/btsdut/mecanique-et-automatisme/bts-maintenance-et-exploitation-des-materiels-aero.html>.

3.2. The French sample

3.2.1. Recruitment and characteristics of the sample

The sampling frame used by the French team was articulated in the first project team meeting and recorded in the first interim report. Interviewees were recruited through extensive use of professional networks of the three researchers, making use also of personal contacts to tap into a further professional network. Although the sample criteria were always made clear, contacts often had only a partial picture of the career and or learning pathway of a person they had identified for inclusion. In several cases promising leads faltered as closer inspection revealed lacunae which rendered them inappropriate for inclusion. Virtual networks were also used to widen the search for recruits to the sample. One interviewee was identified from the professional social media network of one of the researchers. Snowball sampling was also used to good effect, with a handful of interviewees happily recommending work colleagues for inclusion; some without prompting, simply because having told colleagues of their own involvement, they found they wanted to be involved.

All leads were initially screened to ensure they fitted the sampling frame. This initial contact was typically by telephone or Skype and, where successful would lead to conformation of an interview appointment at a mutually convenient time and place. Face to face interviews were conducted in a range of settings; university offices or public spaces, interviewees' place of work, interviewees' homes. Telephone and Skype contact was also used extensively in the course of the project.

Each interview was recorded, and an analysis of the case was produced in English, along with a 10-page edited transcription in the original language (French in this case). Interviews lasted about an hour on average, with the longest interview lasting two hours, the shortest 45 minutes. Follow up interviews were shorter.

The three researchers targeted different but complementary populations for interview. The sample is therefore described in three sets.

3.2.1.1. *First set*

There were six people in this sub-set of the French sample who were interviewed. All interviews have been conducted and transcribed. However, transcripts have been shortened since they are about twice the length that was requested (initially around 20 pages) All the participants have French nationality, grew up and completed at least upper secondary education in France, but did not go beyond higher education bachelor level in their immediate post-school tertiary education. There are three men and three women aged between 35 and 45. They are all performing middle-range jobs and have all expressed several

significant geographical, personal and labour market transitions. Five of them were born and are living in eastern France and have spent at least five years working in France during their career. For those five participants, one has only worked in France, while the other four are now working in Switzerland. The lack of large towns in this part of France, as well as the more buoyant labour market and higher pay on offer in Switzerland are some of the reasons why many French people in this area commute to work across the border. The sixth participant, who initially lived and worked in Paris, now lives in Switzerland, worked for three years in France before moving to work in Switzerland and other countries around the world (in India, Africa). The whole sample reflects a range of different career and learning pathways as well as an interesting blend of career decision-making styles. It was felt that including some frontier workers living and working in different countries would add an extra dimension to the challenges of mobility faced in labour market transitions.

3.2.1.2. *Second set*

There were seven people in the second sub-set of the French sample. The interviews were conducted through three basic stages: contact and selection of the interviewees; conducting the first round basic interviews (including their transcription and analysis); conducting the follow-up interviews and completion of their related case studies. The interviewees within the targeted sample were contacted and selected according to the following basic criteria: falling within range the age group: 30-35 to 45-50 years old, holding at most an initial qualification equivalent to EQF level 6, and having gone through at least one learning/working transition (including taking into consideration a minimum gender balance). The selected interviewees were: three male interviewees aged between 35 and 45 and four female interviewees aged between early 30s and late 40s.

The first round interviews were recorded face-to-face interviews which lasted, on average, one hour to two hours each. Then these recorded interviews were transcribed and each case was analysed thematically. The three follow-up interviews were conducted, at least six months after the first round interviews, in December 2012 and January 2013. There were also face-to-face interviews and lasted 45 minutes on average each. These follow-up interviews were then used to update the following case studies: Fabrice (banker); Monique (sales deputy manager); Nicole (healthcare assistant): an iconic case.

3.2.1.3. *Third set*

There were eight people in the third sub-set of the French sample. These interviews had a wide geographical coverage and because the later interviews of this group occurred a little later than those conducted by the other two

researchers, this group was able to ensure that the sample as a whole was both fairly balanced in terms of gender, levels of qualification, etc., but was also diverse in terms of the patterns of experience within the sample.

3.2.1.4. *Sample as a whole*

A total of 21 interviews make up the French sample, with a gender balance just tipped in favour of women (11) compared with men (10). One respondent was at the top of the age range at over 45 years, leaving a fairly balanced age distribution of seven interviewees aged between 40 and 45, a further seven aged between 35 and 39 and the remaining six respondents just under 35 years of age. Most respondents were married; 14 in total equally balanced across gender (seven male, seven female). All 14 of these married people have children. Six in our sample described themselves as single, equally balanced again across gender (three male, three female). None of these single people have children. The remaining respondent described himself as 'in a relationship'.

3.2.1.5. *Four clusters*

Several additional characteristics were worth identifying in that they could be used as a base for comparison within and across different sub-groups in the French sample. First, six interviewees were healthcare workers, working in different branches of healthcare, including mental health and well-being. Three are nurses, each having opted for a different specialism in acute care, intensive care and infectious diseases. Three work in mental health and well-being, with one social worker and two clinical psychologists. The clinical psychologists are not currently working in direct contact with patients/clients, but designing (and managing) programmes of clinical interventions which support target client groups as part of humanitarian support. However, all six workers share a very clear sense of their occupation and what type of pathways are open to them as a consequence of choosing a clearly delineated pathway.

The point was also made above about 'frontier workers', as a small number in the French sample literally crossed borders on a daily basis when commuting from home to work. Not surprisingly, this happens when people are located on a country border and can see some advantage in working in a country other than the one of their residence, typically because the pay or conditions are better. In one case a worker chose to work in France but for a German company simply because the German company paid more. Although not a literal frontier worker, he is included in this cluster because he actively seeks an employer beyond his country of residence. Movement of labour for economic advantage was evident in two cases within the French sample. One is Nicolas, an immigrant worker who is now a permanent resident, the other is Babul, who was born in France because his parents had moved there from their original country of birth. Babul, although

born and educated in France, reported racial discrimination which he had encountered from his schooldays right through his working life.

Another cluster, of six interviewees, comprised freelance workers and/or the self-employed. Some of these individuals were self-employed or working freelance as a personal preference and a deliberate choice, in other cases it was an accommodation reached to satisfy employers. Those working outside traditional employment structures are a group of particular interest in the context of the project as a whole – do they maintain distinct identities separate from employees or do they switch roles and identities across the life-course as their careers develop.

Another cluster of particular interest because they have not followed more conventional skill formation routes is those who have no formal qualifications and yet have been able to develop successful careers. The first characteristic of this cluster is readily identified; where someone has no formal qualification this is a matter of record. This is not to say that they lack skills or lack knowledge, but that skills and knowledge have been acquired but not formally recognised. In some cases, the learning process where the skills were acquired may itself have been formal; a training course undertaken but not completed for example. The second characteristic is less clear cut; typically the respondent himself or herself is happy to report their success in their terms which included reference to remuneration, to being in demand, to being appreciated for their work or to being satisfied with their job. In these cases, while the respondent is confident that they have a skill level which attracts external approbation, they are also very aware that having formal qualifications is desirable over and above having the requisite skills in place.

3.2.2. Summary table for French sample as a whole

Pseudonym, gender, age, dependants, (educational) background	Current employment, cluster	Key themes; learning/transitions	Career decision-making style	Second interview? If change in prospects
Adèle: F; 30s; two children; part-time (60%) permanent employment; Bac +3, nurse diploma/several non-qualifying training courses	acute care nurse in a small hospital in Switzerland; frontier worker/healthcare sector	structure versus agency/health care/frontier work/work-life balance	Evaluative (iconic case)	No
Françoise: F; 40s; two children; part-time (80%) permanent employment; BEP as social worker (<i>animatrice</i>)/Bac equivalent/BAFA (<i>brevet d'aptitude de fonction d'animateur</i>)	social worker with old people in a small Swiss hospital; frontier worker/healthcare sector	frontier work/responsibilities at work versus family life→ gendered dilemma; learning difficulties but yet successful; bad experience with guidance/overqualified for what she is doing in Switzerland	Aspirational (and evaluative)	Yes; after 11 years in the same position, she needed an new impetus to her career
Antoinette: F; 30s; two children; part-time (60%) permanent employment; Bac +3, nurse diploma/several non-qualifying training courses	infectious disease nurse in a large Swiss hospital; frontier worker/healthcare sector	learning for personal development; professional learning and career transitions as a mean of developing personally	Opportunistic (and evaluative)	No; satisfying work-life balance and no plans for changing
Henri: M; 30s; one child; full-time permanent employment + self-employed; Bac in technology and BTS in micro-technology in France/five years in-service training in a Swiss school of engineering (equivalent to Bac +3)	operational manager in watch and jewel microtechnology in Switzerland; small business at home designing and assembling micro-technological machines; iconic case: frontier worker; also self-employed freelance aspect	strategic learning/rationality/iconic case for strategic thinking, behaviour and attitudes/not much reflexive; had to give up the idea of enrolling into an army career because of health problems/linear, vertical and hierarchical development in his field	Strategic (iconic)	Yes; first interview, about to reach his dream job → head of production; good news of promotion but nothing substantive to add; not really reflective
Emile: 40s; two children; full-time permanent employment; CAP as a cook/CFC as a dietician cook in Switzerland	<i>second de cuisine</i> in a small Swiss hospital; frontier worker	frontier work (qualification paradox)/gendered work-life balance at mid-career; made his way around France and Switzerland for around 12 years in the luxury hotel business before changing for dietetic cuisine/crucial mid-career settling down	Evaluative	No; satisfying work-life balance; no plan for change; not very reflexive

Gaston: M; 30s; one child; full-time permanent employment; Bac (social and economic)	working in the same security company for 16 years: starting as a security agent, currently administrative manager; no formal qualification but yet successful	Case of when personal learning becomes useful for your job; gave up the idea of a career in the army because of financial reasons; linear and hierarchical development within the same company; development of IT skills on the side → direct applications at work	Strategic: 'I fear boredom'	Yes; was thinking of validating his IT skills through <i>validation des acquis</i> process
Fabrice: M; 40s; two children; full-time permanent (open-ended) work contract; university diploma of technology (DUT= Bac +2 = EQF level 5) in <i>commercialisation techniques</i> ; Specialised diploma in banking: <i>brevet bancaire</i> (NQF level 4 = EQF level 4)	Senior financial adviser to individual customers and free-lance professionals in a bank	Hierarchical professional development; functional and geographical mobility; work and family life balance and stability at mid-career; tailor-made CVT; development of wider and specific communication and managerial skills; strong identification with his professional identity as a banker; started work as an insurance agent for six months, then worked in a large French bank for 21 years through six jobs; two transition stages (facilitated through undertaking tailor-made training/seminars and on-the-job-experiential learning)	Basically strategic	Yes, happy with banking career and prospects: aspiration to work with individual customers (e.g. self-employed) and/or enterprises
Nicholas: M; 40s; three children; full-time permanent (open-ended) work contract; secondary general education diploma equivalent to Bac (NQF level 4 = EQF level 4); a two-year professional training in secretarial work as a personal assistant mediator; Bachelor's degree in economics (EQF level 6).	conditioning agent (agent de conditionnement) ; frontier worker	learning and professional development as ombudsman/mediator work experience; distance learning; working as a migrant; constrained/blocked professional identity (in the last two stages of his career); three important career stages: 15 years assistant mediator in Pakistan and distance learning courses (open university); bachelor' degree in economics (stage of high level of professional development); seven years of precarious employment (long period of unemployment followed by periods of short-term temporary employment); now working on regular full-time basis as a conditioning agent (in food transformation and conditioning industry), but his last job remains basically manual and degrading in comparison with his initial qualifications and work experience acquired during the first stage of his career	Strategic (during the first stage of his career); constrained aspirational and opportunistic career decision-making style (during the last two stages of his career)	No; the nature of work and conditions are not fully compatible with his health and expectations for future development; intending to launch own independent activity in food catering with his wife and perhaps undertaking, in parallel, the activity of trainer in badminton

Monique: F; 30s; single; no children; full-time permanent (open-ended) work contract; baccalaureate in sciences-mathematics (NQF level 4 = EQF level 4); bachelor's degree in architecture (NQF level 2 = EQF level 6)	deputy sales manager	Work-life imbalance, insufficient balance between wage level and assigned work-load and responsibilities, but challenging rich work experience in terms of acquired skills and competence through functional, promotional and geographical mobility; although holder of formal qualifications in architecture, working for 11 years in commercial sales of ready-to-wear; two main stages with several transitions: first stage of career (made of several part-time jobs over six years) was dedicated to financing her part-time higher education in architecture. After a short transitional period of one year working as an assistant fashion photographer she continued as a seller and then as a deputy sales manager via three main geographical mobility transitions between three French regions: for her, it has been interesting and challenging work experience (rich in acquired experiential learning)	Basically combines aspirational and strategic decision-making styles	Yes; confirmation of DSM job in Paris; aiming to acquire further responsibility and work experience: possible future promotion to sales manager, also possible certification based CVT (possibly via CIF scheme).
Serge; M; 30s; one child; full-time permanent (open-ended) work contract; professional baccalaureate (Bac Pro: NQF level 4 = EQF level 4) in transport and logistics; a professional qualification as conductor with urban driving plus a professional driving licence type D (obtained while working via CIF scheme).	tram driver	Access to further formal vocational qualifications and professional development with work-life balance, especially via undertaking self-directed CVT (CIF scheme: qualification oriented paid individual training leave). Three work and learning transitions characterise his career of 14 years: two years of different short-term work assignments undertaken through temporary employment agencies, then six years of work as a freighter within a merchandise transportation company, followed lastly (after undertaking a qualifying paid training leave within CIF scheme) by six years working as tram driver (current occupation) with more secure employment status and work-life balance	Basically aspirational and strategic decision-making styles	No; not interested at the moment to change his present secure work with family life-balance, but he does not exclude the possibility of launching his own activity in car selling business

Chantal: F; 40s; two children; self-employed; baccalaureate option D in sciences-biology (NQF level 4 = EQF level 4); two-year university diploma in general studies (DEUG: NQF level 3 = EQF level 5); bachelor's degree in linguistics applied to English (NQF level 2 = EQF level 6); diploma in translating and interpreting (EQF level 6) obtained while working.	international professional interpreter; frontier worker	Developing a set of skills and competences (regularly updated) as an international interpreter (French, English, German) with strong identification with vocational identity. Two basic career stages: over 23 years of work experience: first stage consisted of five years working basically as a French language teacher within two UK universities (obtained in parallel a diploma in translating and interpreting). Then followed the second main stage: 18 years working as self-employed professional international interpreter: interesting and challenging work experience (rich in acquired experiential learning and professional development), but stressful heavy work-load more based on geographical mobility with less family life-work balance	Basically aspirational and strategic decision-making style	No; still an international professional interpreter, but hopes to change status from self-employed to employee working on the basis of open-ended contract with one employer (to have less stressful work-family life balance)
Roseline: F; 30s; no children; full-time permanent (open-ended) work contract; baccalaureate in sciences (NQF level 4 = EQF level 4); two-year university diploma in general studies (DEUG: only one completed year); State diploma in nursing (DEI- <i>diplôme d'état d'infirmiers/infirmières</i> : EQF level 6 = NQF level 2)	nurse (in intensive care department within private clinic); healthcare worker	Personal agency versus constraints of hierarchical and complex organisational structures; professional development via the construction of diversified portfolio of work experiences, skills and competence in nursing; Three stages in her career development of 10 years working as a nurse: first four years in intensive care unit of private clinic. Then worked for one year (in public and private clinics) through the intermediation of different temporary employment agencies (for diversifying her nursing work experiences and exploring better job opportunities in nursing). Then for last five years within a relatively small private clinic (as it meets her preferences for working within non-complex hierarchical and organisational structures)	Aspirational, opportunistic channelled basically within the framework a strategic decision-making style	No; happy with present occupation and organisation (non-hierarchical); Might be interested in going in the future for a two-year specialisation qualification as an anaesthetist by obtaining the financial support via one of self-directed CVT measures such the CIF scheme

Nicole; F; 40s; one child; full-time permanent (open-ended) work contract; professional aptitude certificate (CAP: NQF level 5 = EQF level 3) in hairdressing; professional certificate (BP: NQF level 4 = EQF level 4) in mixed hairdressing.	healthcare assistant (agent hospitalier); healthcare worker	Professional development through different work transitions, experiential learning, geographical, functional and promotional mobility; use of self- directed CVT instruments such as VAE and CFP for further career development; personal agency (with strong identification with healthcare vocational identity since her adolescence) versus structure (the constraint of strong family identification with commercial businesses); <u>Iconic case</u> . 31 years of professional development through work and experiential learning in three basic different stages: 20 years of promotional work and related learning transitions in ready-to-wear sales business with seven job changes via functional, geographical and promotional mobility; five years of professional re- orientation training and re-conversion transitions for starting a new career in healthcare; finally six years of work as a healthcare assistant (ultimately achieving her adolescent dream to work in healthcare)	Aspirational and strategic	Yes; happy as a healthcare assistant, and interested in getting (at least) an equivalent formal status by obtaining the State diploma of an assistant nurse through VAE or CFP to follow a DEAS training programme: an important step toward international mobility or working on free-lance basis
Achille; M; 30s; no children; permanent full-time; CAP catering, BTS, licence pro	head chef	satisfied parental demand for classic training (economics) then pursued his passion; keen to expand professional repertoire; work based learning most valued; prepared to relocate for work or relationship	Strategic	Yes; promoted to head chef by second interview, pleased with career progression
Babul; M; 30s; no children; work-based training scheme; BEP mechanical engineering, BEP retail, <i>diplome d'access etudes universitaires</i> , completing CAPA landscape gardening	trainee landscape gardener	encounters racial discrimination and prejudice; eye accident affected confidence; wants to qualify and secure employment; encounters racial discrimination	Evaluative by nature, opportunistic out of necessity – given systemic discrimination	Yes, but no significant change
Charles; M; 30s; no children; permanent full-time; BEP motor mechanics, BAC Pro heavy plant operator	operative, installing automatic gates/doors; frontier worker/freelance	strong work ethic but sense of disappointment that he is not achieving his potential; gaps in career story due to unspecified problems disappointed he could not apply off the job learning in heavy plan to paid work	Difficult to discern, but opportunistic is best fit	Declined
Didier; M; 30s; no children; self-employed; BAC Pro landscape gardening, not completed	garden designer; no formal qualification but yet successful	values the artisan approach, succeeding in small business, considering expanding; formal learning useful but experiential learning more rapid and deep	Evaluative, highly reflective, searching for meaning in work	Yes, but no significant change

Eugene; M; 40s; four children; self-employed; BTS international commerce, currently undertaking coaching course	consultant and coach; no formal qualification but yet successful; self-employed	Achieved success (his definition) in corporate business but wanted better quality of life for his family so opted for self-employment; acutely aware that his level of competence far greater than his formal qualifications	Aspirational, driven exclusively by emotions	Yes, but no significant change
Florence; F; 30s; one child; freelance on retainer with one company (80%; licence, masters, DESS interventions sociologiques	market researcher	managing transition back to work after maternity leave current challenge; higher level studies intended to equip her for work but fast and deep learning only on the job; actively managing transition to working mother	Strategic	Yes, but nothing to report
Giselle; F; 30s; no children; full-time on rolling contracts; DEUG, degree, DESS and DEA Bac +5	clinical psychologist, managing projects; healthcare	making a difference to the psychological well-being of her clients is paramount; securing funding and managing projects important learning on top of professional practice	Evaluative	Yes, but no significant change
Hedwige; F; 40s; one child; full-time permanent; DEUG, degree, DESS and DEA Bac +5	Clinical psychologist, managing project; healthcare	no learning is ever wasted, it transfers readily and supports her day-to-day; understanding business functions key to managing clinical service	Evaluative	Yes, but no significant change

3.3. Experience of labour market transitions

3.3.1. Engagement with formal educational and training system (IVET; higher education; CVT; VAE)

There were a diverse range of initial qualifications and there seemed to be a clear distinction between two groups: those who participated in a range of CVT programmes and those who did not engage with certified formal learning and development programmes. Within the French system IVET is stratified in the sense that different qualifications open up very different sets of opportunities. However, experience rapidly becomes important too for future career development and there may also be extended transitions before people are able to get into permanent employment.

Many of the French sample had appropriate qualifications for their chosen occupation which were acquired during their initial vocational education and training, supplemented in some cases by higher education qualifications. However, even where there clear alignments as with nursing, social workers, engineers and chefs, this did not necessarily mean that transitions were straightforward. For example, Adèle acquired a (Bac +3) nurse diploma and subsequently worked as a nurse, but she did not complete her specialist training as an operating room nurse, as she left her course in Paris for personal reasons. Whereas Monique completed her architecture qualification but her part-time work experience and other interests (photography) opportunistically took her down another route where she ended up in commercial sales and then she followed that path.

Other interviewees' post-compulsory education and training was vocationally or professionally oriented, but not so clearly focused upon a particular occupational pathway. Such provision is the underpinning of the different upper-secondary college diplomas (Bac Pro and BTn) and subsequent qualifications such as the high technician diplomas (BTS). Again there are some cases of progressive focusing of career direction in line with their qualifications, as with Fabrice moving into banking, but other individuals' careers move in a radically different direction to their qualifications, for example sales or landscape gardening.

There is a similarly mixed picture between individuals in how much use they make of the formal CVT system and whether training courses resulted in formal qualifications or not, although in areas like nursing both types of provision were common. In some cases, such as with Chantal the interpreter her diploma in translating and interpreting was based upon both formal and experiential learning. For the future as well interviewees often had plans to make use of the formal CVT provision or systems of validation of experiential experience to further their career prospects.

Finally, there was a small group of interviewees whose career development was almost wholly based upon their experience without much engagement with the formal CVT system at all. They were a small minority, however, and they might be vulnerable in the labour market if, for any reason, they lost their current jobs.

3.3.2. Experience of major career transitions

It may be instructive to get an overall sense of the types of major changes in career direction which the French interviewees experienced. In some cases, the redirection was driven by health concerns: for example, Gaston had to give up on his idea of a career in the army career because of health problems, whereas for Babul an eye accident so affected his confidence that he completely reoriented how he thought of his career. In other cases, a desire to settle down and lead a different life-style was behind a shift in career emphasis, as when Emile decided after working for 12 years working as a chef in luxury hotels in France and Switzerland he chose to specialise in dietetic cuisine in a hospital. In other cases the location and context of work are very different, as for Eugene, who was originally working in Africa, harvesting timber for export in the rain forest, and then returned to France to take up an office-based job importing hardwood, and Nicholas, who worked as an assistant mediator in ombudsman mediating offices in Pakistan, but upon coming to France could only find precarious relatively low skilled employment. However, outlining different types of major career transitions as above only acts to draw attention to the wish for us to know more about the individual stories. So it is to those to which we now turn.

3.4. Representation of the career journeys of the French sample

3.4.1. Some iconic cases

It would be too lengthy to produce detailed strategic career and learning biographies of all 21 French interviewees, so five iconic cases were chosen to illustrate particular themes and these can be found in the main report: Adèle; Eugene; Henri; Nicole; Didier.

3.4.2. Strategic learning and career biographies – Summaries

There is not space to give details of all interviewees but an outline of the strategic learning and career biographies of another eight interviewees will give some indication of the sheer range of different pathways and meanings attached to career and labour market transitions. Details of the five interviewees used as iconic cases are not repeated here.

3.4.2.1. *Françoise*

Françoise is in the older age group. She is married and has two teenage daughters. For the last 11 years she has been working in a permanent position as a social worker with old people in a small town hospital in Switzerland for 11 years, but she still lives in France. As for her education and training path, she experienced difficulties in learning at secondary school. Then she completed upper secondary level through VET: she got BES (*Brevet d'enseignement supérieur*) training as a social worker (*animatrice*). She enjoyed this training, which reconciled her with learning. Then she completed three years additional training as a social worker (*animateur*), the BAFA (*brevet d'aptitude de fonction d'animateur*). The latter required a Bac equivalent. So she completed an eight months study programme for catching up the Bac level.

Concerning employment, she did several internships as social workers in holiday camps for children and with mentally handicapped adults. Then for 10 years she was employed as a social worker, alternating between both sectors in France. She then experienced social work with old people when hired in the Swiss hospital as a social worker but with a lower status. So she is somehow under-employed. However, she is still earning more than what she could get in a higher status position corresponding to her level of qualification in France.

The need for going further into learning and education and pursuing her dreams has always been an input for change. She mentioned several times this was the first job as a social worker which she was enjoying so much and that she finally felt she was pursuing her very challenging career objectives. Difficult tasks are challenging for her. She is persevering. 'It was horrible but exciting, it was a real vocational training, I finally reached it and I couldn't consider it may not work out'. Moreover, Françoise has a very enthusiastic and lively personality. Her narrative is very positive using many superlatives (absolutely fantastic; a true revelation; super good level; very, very difficult; so unbelievable). She somehow sounds like a child telling an exciting story. She is also very proud of her career and educational path since she experienced difficulties at school and ended up working as a qualified social worker (Bac +3).

Currently, she needs some change and new challenge. She has been expecting her superiors to provide her with responsibilities and project management for five years. What prevents her from leaving are convenient working hours, the fact that she loves working with old people and also because she is involved in personal projects at the moment (building a family house). But her new objectives are getting a job in Switzerland corresponding to her level of qualification, getting responsibilities, keeping learning, maybe enrolling in a new training but anyway growing. She is drawn between her need of stability and her personal and professional need for growth. She is representative of the aspirational career decision-making style. Interestingly, her first career

aspirations were targeted towards a sport career (handball) or an artistic career (fine arts).

Overall, Françoise has a permanent, part-time (80%) position as a social worker (*animatrice*) working with old people in a small Swiss hospital. She had a bad experience with guidance in the past and feels overqualified for what she is doing in Switzerland, although she is well paid and the work fits with her personal projects. She is a frontier worker and the tensions between responsibilities at work versus family life represent a common (often gendered) dilemma. She is proud of overcoming initial learning difficulties in achieving a successful career. Her career decision-making style was aspirational, but also has evaluative characteristics. She was re-interviewed and felt that after 11 years in the same position, she needed to give a new impetus to her career.

3.4.2.2. *Antoinette*

Antoinette is in the younger age group. She is married and now lives in Switzerland with her husband and their two children. Antoinette has been employed for four years in a permanent position as an infectious disease nurse in a large Swiss hospital. Antoinette's educational background is upper-secondary education (Bac) and higher education (nurse diploma in three years). Then she mainly learnt while working without getting any further qualifications. However, she grabbed the opportunity to initiate and lead some large projects at work.

The transition from school to labour market in Paris had been a difficult time for her, hesitating to change job and having trouble in finding her professional identity. She was both going through difficult personal issues and was overwhelmed by very competitive and scarce opportunities for permanent work contracts and demanding work environments. 'I have been dangerous for patients' ⁽¹⁴⁾. She then gained self-confidence through a series of temporary employments in different units in Paris and Lyon.

Her need of mobility and openness to change in addition to heartbreak led her to move from Paris to Lyon and then to Switzerland. 'I had wanderlust'. Her first job in Switzerland was a crucial transition in her personal and professional live. 'It was a revelation of joy and well-being, for me and my job [...] a revelation that I was able to live happy somewhere'. She briefly went back to Lyon and then moved to another hospital in Switzerland for a temporary job as an oncology nurse. Then she spent a couple of years back and forth between France, Switzerland, India and Burkina Faso. To fulfil her dreams, she in fact went twice for temporary relief work in India and Burkina Faso.

⁽¹⁴⁾ It is common for newly qualified nurses to feel overwhelmed if they do not get sufficient support – see e.g. Eraut et al., 2004.

Since then, she always went back to Switzerland and in oncology units where she both found a personal (far from her heartbreaker) and professional relief ('more human working conditions'). Then she lived several years of transition (had two children in-between) until she found this new balance she has got now, that is a part-time job with an interesting pathology, less involvement required but still much relational aspects. This is a situation she wants to keep for the long-term.

Antoinette is probably representative of an evaluative career decision-making style. She is 'engaged in a recurrent and ongoing process of critical self-reflection, based on emotional as well as practical considerations'. When asked to express what led her to make the changes she made: 'curiosity, the search of personal well-being and blooming in my job'. Moreover, she developed a personal self-awareness about her particular skill sets. Once she discovered oncology, it helped her to find her professional identity. She really enjoyed it as it responded to her need of relational and less technical aspects of the job. She then kept looking for those kinds of aspects central to the job even if it implies great personal involvement.

Overall, Antoinette has a permanent, part-time (60%) post as an infectious disease nurse in a large Swiss hospital. Her professional learning and career transitions have been a means of developing personally. She is a frontier worker with an opportunistic career decision-making style, but also demonstrating some evaluative aspects. She has found a satisfying work-life balance and had no plans for changing at present.

3.4.2.3. *Émile*

Émile is in the older age group. He is living in an eastern French town with his wife and their two children. He has been working on a permanent contract as a *second de cuisine* in a small hospital in Switzerland for three years. He is cooking dietetic meals for patients. Getting to that kind of cuisine has been a crucial stage of his career life since up to that time he had spent his whole career working in luxury hotels. When arriving in this hospital, he was asked to complete a CFC (*certificat fédéral de capacité*, equivalent to CAP) in dietetic cuisine. This made him study extensively part-time during one year alongside working at his job.

His educational background is upper secondary education through VET. He got a CAP as a cook in eastern France in a four star hotel. After getting his CAP, he spent a couple of years working around France (eastern France, south of France, Paris) as a cook (*commis de cuisine*) always in luxury hotels except one year he worked as a cook in the navy. Then, he was able to get higher status jobs as chief (*chef de partie*) first in Paris and then in Switzerland.

In the first part of his career path, his narrative is all about knowing the right person and being at the right place. It sounds as if he had not made intentional

career decisions but rather let himself be guided by the implicit rules in his professional context: that is experiencing a lot of mobility to progress as a cook as well as trying to break into a 'closed circle' to get recognised. At some point (presumably when he met his wife), he intentionally decided to settle down and consequently to change the professional (public) sector. 'Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to make it, never. You can have children but afterwards you don't have the same schedule, same expectations according to the job, it's totally different'. There's an interesting parallel between both sectors' values (private versus public sectors) and his personal values and career trends (creativity, mobility, challenge versus motivating and mothering employees). It sounds like a sacrifice because he left a sector he definitely enjoyed with managing responsibilities to go into a less prestigious and less exciting sector. However, he is enjoying a comfortable family life in return.

Emile is a dietician cook *second de cuisine* in a small Swiss hospital. He made his way around France and Switzerland for around 12 years in the luxury hotel business before changing for dietetic cuisine as part of a crucial mid-career settling down period. He is a frontier worker who made a (gendered) work-life balance choice in mid-career. He has an evaluative career decision-making style and having found a satisfying work-life balance he has no plans for change. He is not very reflexive.

3.4.2.4. Gaston

Gaston is in the younger age group. He is married and lives with his wife and their young daughter. Gaston has been working for the same security company in eastern France for over 15 years, since he first entered the labour market. Gaston has an educational background in general upper secondary level (Bac in social studies and economics). He started to study law at university to subsequently access a managerial position in the army but he abandoned university because of financial reasons. Then he spent two years training as a police officer in the army. As he was very young, he was asked to have other professional experiences before coming back to the army. Thanks to an uncle, he entered a security company for temporary employment as a security agent. Since then, he has never left that company. He has not completed any further qualification. He has mainly learned while working and has self-trained in IT skills on the side. He has been gradually promoted as a team manager (*chef d'équipe*), operation manager (*responsable d'exploitation et responsable de planification*) and finally administrative manager (*responsable du système d'information*) (progression within an organisational labour market).

Gaston has been promoted very quickly within the company. He was very young when he was given responsibilities. Gaston often speaks about himself as a 'too nice' guy, too young to be credible as a manager. However, he has been

promoted because of his huge involvement in the company: high organisational attachment. From the moment he started working there, he worked a very large number of extra hours. Some of them were paid but most were done at home at night for free. He has also never stopped working at home at night developing IT tools for the company. 'At each new stage, my aim was anyway to try to progress because, well, I think I fear boredom'. He needs challenging tasks to be motivated to work. He got promoted through a huge personal involvement at work. This involvement has been much rewarded and he was eventually promoted as an administrative manager (*responsable du système d'information*) providing the company with IT tools. This is what he has been doing on the side of his work for years. He has been thinking for a while of having his IT skills validated (*validation des acquis*) to get a qualification as a computer scientist.

Gaston is probably representative of a strategic career decision-making style. Indeed, in his narrative, the career decisions he made during his career were characterised by 'a rational appraisal of information, which then forms the basis for action'. For instance: 'when I took this position, for the first time I almost did it reluctantly. As I told you, whenever I applied for a job, I know I've got the skills. That time was the first time I took it to keep doors open'.

Gaston has been working in the same security company for 16 years. He started as a security agent but is currently administrative manager (*responsable du système d'information*). He gave up the idea of a career in the army because of financial reasons, but since then has enjoyed linear and hierarchical development within the same company. His development of IT skills on the side had direct applications at work. He has no post-school formal qualifications yet he has been successful in work. In one sense, Gaston is a frontier worker in that his work has involved crossing significant boundaries within work. He is also an interesting example of when personal learning becomes realised in your job. His career decision-making style is strategic and he 'fears boredom.' He was reinterviewed and he was still thinking of validating his IT skills through the *validation des acquis* process.

3.4.2.5. Fabrice

Fabrice is in the older age group (over 40) and is married with two children. He has a full-time permanent (open ended) work contract as a 'senior financial adviser to individual customers and free-lance professionals' in a bank. He has a university diploma of technology (DUT = Bac +2 = EQF level 5) in *commercialisation techniques* and a specialised diploma in banking, *brevet bancaire* (NQF level 4 = EQF level 4).

He started work as an insurance agent in an insurance group for six months, then he moved to work in several branches of a large international French banking group for the last 21 years. He has had six jobs (within the same banking

group) channelled in two transition stages (facilitated through undertaken tailor-made training/seminars and on-the-job-experiential learning): an early pyramidal professional development through promotional geographical mobility, then more functional responsibilities with less geographical mobility but more family life-work balance at his mid-career stage.

His hierarchical professional development was built on promotions made possible through his functional and geographical mobility. Work and family life balance and stability became important to him later in his career. His tailor-made continuing vocational training facilitated development of wider and specific communication and managerial skills. He has a strong identification with his professional identity as a banker and his career decision-making style is basically strategic. In his second interview he reiterated that he is quite happy making a career in banking with all its prospects for future development, he has no intention in moving to a different sector of activity as an employee or to become self-employed. His intention within the same banking profession is to move on to more challenging work: in the future to deal with superior segments of individual customers (individuals and self-employed professionals) and/or go for another banking segment more connected with enterprises.

3.4.2.6. *Nicholas*

Nicholas is in the older age group and is married with three children. He has a full-time permanent (open-ended) work contract as a 'conditioning agent' in the food transformation and conditioning industry. He has a secondary general education diploma equivalent to Bac (NQF level 4 = EQF level 4); a two-year professional training in secretarial work as a personal assistant mediator; and a bachelor's degree in economics (EQF level 6).

His career has three important stages. The first stage involved 15 years working as an assistant mediator in ombudsman mediating offices in Pakistan and undertaking (while working) distant learning courses (at an open university) and completing a bachelor degree in economics. This graduate level education coupled with challenging associate professional work represented a stage of high level of professional development.

Nicholas then emigrated and he has been resident and working in France for over a decade.

The second stage of his career did not go well and it represented seven years of precarious employment, comprising a long period of unemployment followed by periods of short-term temporary employment. The third stage of his career has involved working on a regular full-time basis as a 'conditioning agent', but this job remains basically manual and is relatively degrading in comparison with his initial qualifications and work experience acquired during the first stage of his career.

Learning and professional development through ombudsman mediating work experience; distant learning; working as a migrant; constrained/blocked professional identity (in the last two stage of his career). Strategic (during the first stage of his career); constrained aspirational and opportunistic career decision-making style (during the last two stages of his career). As the nature of work and working conditions are not fully compatible with his health and his expectations for future development, he is intending to launch his own independent activity in food catering in cooperation with his wife and perhaps undertaking, in parallel, the activity of trainer in badminton.

3.4.2.7. *Achille*

Achille is in the younger age group. He has been working for over 10 years, including seven years as a chef. He has progressed through a series of promotions through the culinary ranks: from chef de partie to chef de rang, then chef de partie again to junior sous chef. At the second interview he revealed he had been promoted to head chef, and that he was pleased with his career progression.

Started vacation work aged 17 and undertook short term contracts (returning to large leisure complex) in hospitality and catering including as a kitchen porter, barman, waiter and banqueting waiter. Completed an Economics baccalaureate, but rather than following an academic path, decided he wanted to enter the hospitality and catering field, so he followed a one-year conversion course to secure access onto BTS in hotel and restaurant management. The BTS follows a national syllabus ensuring that all graduates have covered the same curriculum, irrespective of their place of study. Achille then progressed to a first degree in catering and hospitality management. The slant of Hospitality in French higher education tends to be that of applied management, providing students with IT skills, foreign language, and contextualised knowledge (e.g. financial analysis of hotel accounts) needed at managerial level in the industry. Therefore Achille had varied practical experience from vacation work, a practical grounding in his BTS plus higher level applied skills, knowledge and understanding before seeking full-time employment. Even as a chef he followed the classic development path of getting experience of a wide variety of working environments in France and then later in England.

Geographically mobile: has worked in different places in France and as he was keen to develop proficiency in English and to experience wide range of work within the sector, he has also worked in the Channel Islands and England. Sees lifelong learning as normal: 'I've always wanted to go further, I've always wanted to develop' not least because that is what great chefs do.

Skills, knowledge and understanding required

He is very aware that all of his learning makes its contribution to the sum of his skills, knowledge and understanding.

Significant work and learning transitions

Summer job in a small hotel restaurant in the Channel Isles, cuisine pitched towards the higher end of the culinary scale. Highly significant work experience in that he opted for it primarily as a way of developing his English language proficiency, but it also allowed him to get hands on in a kitchen.

Significant learning experiences

He undertook a 'classic' (as opposed to a vocational) baccalaureate, on economics pathway. Not at all his own choice, very much doing what was expected of him as the first born son. There was a clear parental expectation that he succeed (in academic terms) where they had not. Sees the bac 'leading to everything and to nothing' in that it does not have clear progression route into a particular sector.

Having satisfied his parental expectations, he opted to take a conversion course to get him to the level needed to embark on vocational training leading to being qualified as a chef. This conversion course was very much 'up to scratch' (*mise à niveau*) and he was not typical in that he was going down a level from Bac to CAP.

Sees himself as atypical and difficult to place given his vocational and higher training: 'I can be a waiter, a manager, an administrator, a cook'.

3.4.2.8. Serge – Tram driver/conductor

Significant work and learning transitions, experiences and their impact

Serge is married with one child. He is in his 30s working as a tram driver. He has been occupying this job for seven years. Before this occupation, he worked as freighter (freight forwarder) for six years in a freight enterprise taking in charge the responsibility of the management of all activities connected with the transportation of merchandise to different destinations in and outside France.

For him, his first work experience as a freighter was very interesting, as it allowed him to acquire the following related basic skills and competences:

- professional networking cooperation and interactivity capacities with different types of clients on a national and international level;
- managerial skills and competences connected with the planning and the organisation of safe, efficient and cost-effective transportation of goods.

After leaving the freight company, and to secure a smoother transition to the new job as a tram-conductor, he applied for undertaking a training leading to a

qualification more adapted to the access requirement to the targeted job. So, he benefited from a CIF, paid training leave, lasting six months. After a successful completion of his practical training within the transport training centre, he obtained the professional title of a driver in urban transport (*titre professionnel conducteur/trice du transport urbain*). He obtained additionally a professional driving licence (type D for heavy vehicle driving) as part of the awarded qualification. The on-the-job training acquired competences and skills were basically connected with collective transport of travellers in urban areas mainly by means of trams. The funding of this training leave was fully taken in charge by the Fongecif, a social partners' funds collector and manager, which financed all the training costs within the training centre including conserving the reception of 90% of his salary as a freighter during the whole duration of the training.

The change of occupation from a freighter to a tram-driver was motivated by two basic reasons:

- the freight company was facing financial and economic difficulties connected with its activities towards the end of the period when he worked there. During this difficult period of re-structuring within the employing group (which became private in 2005), he applied for a paid-training leave through CIF to secure his transition to another job within another company. After a successful completion of the training and obtaining the required qualification for the new job as tram driver, he resigned from the company where he had been working for six years as a freighter;
- he was highly interested in seizing any opportunity for making a change in his career by moving on to a different job within a different type of activity.

The earliest jobs in the first 16 months of his career, following the completion of his upper secondary education, were different transitional temporary jobs (of one month each on average) contracted through temporary employment agencies, such as:

- worker within a food-industry factory;
- care preparation (including cleaning and painting);
- construction worker;
- a driver-delivery man of goods.

It was via this last limited-duration work mission undertaken through a temporary employment agency, as a delivery man within a unit of the employing group dealing with freight (management and of transportation of luggage, parcels and packed goods) as one of the sectors connected with the activities of SNCF (French national rail company), he could finally find his first regular job as a freighter.

Significant learning paths, experiences, support and impacts

After the completion of his comprehensive general education in a lower secondary colleges, he opted for following his initial vocational education within an upper secondary professional college (AFT-IFTIM) where he prepared his Bac Pro in transport and logistics (NQF level 4 = EQF level 4). The programme was composed of general and technical subject units (such as languages, mathematics, law, economics, logistics, etc.) and two workplace training periods of six weeks each connected with transport and logistics, the second of which was with a large global transportation and logistics company. During the training, he was supervised by an on-the-job follow-up tutor in cooperation with his pedagogical tutor from the vocational college. He also seized the opportunity of undertaking parallel lessons in driving and obtained his light-weight vehicle driving licence (type B).

It was this IVET qualification which equipped him with the basic competences and skills in transport and logistics which facilitated his access to his first open-ended work contract within a freight company, which lasted six years. While he was completing his last temporary job assignment within the local unit of the freight company, he discovered that they needed ultimately a person to take over from the freight forwarder who was retiring. After a period of trial and training of two months by the departing freight forwarder, he was directly recruited by the company itself on open-ended contract basis to take in charge all tasks and activities previously undertaken by the freight forwarder who left for retirement.

Personal evaluation and perspectives for the future

The first job as a freight forwarder was an interesting experience as it allowed him to acquire the basic competences connected with freight activities, including the development of customer-related managerial and communication skills. Motivated by the desire for a change, reinforced by the economic and financial crisis the company was facing towards the end of the period of working as a freighter, he decided to move on to a different job as tram-conductor. This last job allowed him basically to acquire a more secure status of employment (as a territorial civil servant) with a relatively better remuneration. Due to changing tram technology over time, new driving related skills and competences are developed and acquired on-the-job supported by adaptation associated with timely CVT. This is despite the mainly routine character of the exercised tasks, which are additionally tiresome due the variability of rotating work shifts.

When he was asked whether there are any perspectives for career development in the future, he declared he is not interested at the moment to move on to a different job as an employee within another company and taking the risk of losing a more or less secure job in a increasingly worsening situation of

employment at moment. But, he does not exclude the possibility of launching on his own in an independent activity in the future, perhaps in car selling business. In these perspectives, he thinks of taking over and developing further the present activity of his father when he will leave it for retirement in about four years.

Abbreviation list

AFT-IFTIM	Association for the development of professional training in transport – Institute of Training and Warehousing Techniques (France)
Bac Pro	<i>baccalauréat professionnel</i> (professional baccalaureate)
BC	<i>bilan de compétence</i> (competence audit) http://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/informations-pratiques,89/fiches-pratiques,91/formation-professionnelle,118/le-bilan-de-competences,1073.html
BEP	<i>brevet d'études professionnelles</i> (vocational studies diploma)
BTn	<i>baccalauréat technologique</i> (technological baccalaureate)
BTS	<i>brevet de technicien supérieur</i> (high technician diploma)
CAP	<i>certificat d'aptitude professionnelle</i> (certificate of vocational aptitude)
CBC	<i>congé bilan de compétence</i> (competence audit leave)
CBC	<i>congé de bilan compétence</i> (leave for competence audit)
CFP	<i>congé de formation professionnelle</i> http://www.fonction-publique.gouv.fr/fonction-publique/carriere-et-parcours-professionnel-52
CIF	<i>congé individuel de formation</i> (individual training leave) http://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/informations-pratiques,89/fiches-pratiques,91/formation-professionnelle,118/le-conge-individuel-de-formation,1070.html
CNC	<i>cadre national de certification</i>
CNCP	<i>Commission National des Certifications Professionnelles</i> (National Commission for Vocational Qualifications)
CVAE	<i>congé pour validation des acquis de l'expérience</i> (leave for validation of non formal learning) http://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/informations-pratiques,89/fiches-pratiques,91/formation-professionnelle,118/la-validation-des-acquis-de-l,1074.html
CVT	continuing vocational training
DIF	<i>droit individuel à la formation</i> (individual right to training) http://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/informations-pratiques,89/fiches-pratiques,91/formation-professionnelle,118/le-droit-individuel-a-la-formation,1071.html
DUT	<i>diplôme universitaire de technologie</i> (university diploma in technology)
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
EQF	European qualifications framework
FAF	<i>fonds d'assurance formation des non salariés</i> (insurance fund for self-employed training)
FAF.TT	<i>fonds d'assurance formation du travail temporaire</i> (insurance fund for temporary labour)
Fongecif	<i>fonds de gestion du congé individuel de formation</i> (fund for individual training)
GEIQ	<i>Groupements d'employeurs pour l'insertion et la qualification</i> (grouping of employers for inclusion and qualifications)
IVET	initial vocational education and training
LMD	licence master doctorate
Opacif	<i>organisme paritaire collecteur agréé pour le financement du congé individuel de formation</i>
OPCA	<i>organisme paritaire collecteur agréé</i> (accredited funds collector and manger)

RNCP	<i>répertoire nationale des certifications professionnelles</i> (national register for professional certifications)
SMIC	<i>salaire minimum interprofessionnel de croissance</i> (minimum wage)
VAE	<i>validation des acquis de l'expérience</i> (validation of non formal learning) http://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/informations-pratiques,89/fiches-pratiques,91/formation-professionnelle,118/la-validation-des-acquis-de-l,1074.html
VET	vocational education and training

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CHAPTER 4.

German national report

4.1. The German labour market context

The rise of destandardised, atypical and flexible employment as well as precarious jobs particularly in the service sector coupled with anticipated skills shortages due to demographic shifts are some major trends currently discussed in connection with German labour market developments. However, as the study focused on skilled workers of the mid-career generation currently in employment and who have performed several years of middle ranged jobs, this group seems, apart from some exceptions, rather unlikely to be affected by those trends. Rather we found that the individual careers of the 25 participants the study covered reflect in the first place labour market segmentation by gender, which is characteristic of the German labour market as compared to some other western modernised countries.

The gender differences of the individual learning and career trajectories are generated by two specific characteristics of the German labour market: first, the specific connection between skills formation and labour market structure resulting from the German dual system of VET and, second, the prevalence of the male breadwinner model that makes it likely for women to remain the secondary wage earner in the family. These two factors, in combination with conservative family policies, keep female labour market discrimination distinct despite many favourable developments during the past decades that have made women come to play a key and prominent role in today's labour markets.

4.1.1. Skills formation and the German labour market

The concept of *Beruf* has over centuries structured the German labour market, establishing a close connection between skills formation and occupational labour markets. In this context, the socialising function of apprenticeships (traditionally in crafts and trade) and VET historically played and still plays a central role in directing individuals' learning and career orientations. As a result, individuals' work orientations tend to be strongly anchored in the occupational domain they trained for. Combined with highly standardised and stratified educational and occupational routes based on formal qualifications, this keeps employees' job flexibility and mobility much lower in Germany than in most other European countries, where making transitions between different jobs and occupational domains is not only easier, but also more strongly institutionally facilitated and supported.

Vocational socialisation and training does not only provide individuals with a particular set of vocational skills, qualifications and orientations, but it also functions as a means of social integration both at company level and at labour market level in general. Thereby, individuals are assigned to a social status based on the particular division of labour derived from vocational profiles with specific career progression routes. Skilled workers (*Facharbeiter*) with institutionalised patterns of career progression benefit from high levels of skills protection and social security compared to, for example, unskilled workers. The *Facharbeiter*-career is furthermore associated with full-time, continuous and protected employment and collective workers' participation rights, parameters which constitute the basis of the social security system and benefits like entitlement to unemployment benefits and pensions. This is relevant for female workers insofar as while female labour participation has increased considerably over the past decades, most of this increase since the 1990s has been in the segment of part-time and atypical work: between 1991 und 2004 female part-time employment rose by 1.8 Million employees while during the same period female full-time employment decreased by 1.6 Million (Bothfeld et al., 2005).

Through the central role of the dual system of education and training for the German economy, the relative position of the vocational track, as against the academic route, has traditionally been very strong, much stronger than in many other countries ⁽¹⁵⁾. Despite eroding tendencies of the dual system since the 1990s coupled with decreasing numbers of apprentices, this is reflected in the vocational route still being taken up by almost 60% of a school leaving cohort and the fact that at least for most male employees of the intermediate skills segment, well-developed vocational skills still tend to ensure a fairly smooth school-to-work transition. Furthermore, the German education system stands out for the relative early stratification between vocational and academic tracks based on the three pillar school system after completion of primary school. This prepares pupils as early as at the age of 10 (or 12 in some federal States) to either pursue a vocational track after 10 years of schooling with a school leaving certificate of *Haupt-* or *Realschule*, or a higher education or academic track after 12 or, alternatively, 13 years of schooling with a school leaving certificate of the *Gymnasium* and a university entry qualification. Such an early tracking significantly restricts future educational and career choices as changing between the different school types at secondary level is fairly difficult. For both men's and

⁽¹⁵⁾ The dual model is characterised by the combination of theoretical subject-oriented and general education in vocational schools and company-based training. Varying according to vocational specialisation, apprentices spend about 15% of their training in vocational schools and the remaining time in the company, which also hold the employment contract with the apprentices.

women's career pathways this early stratification can constitute a major obstacle to realise future career development opportunities.

Apart from Germany standing out for an early division between the vocational and the academic route, the dual system itself generates gendered professions and career development pathways. Historically, the crafts-based apprenticeship model was introduced to the training of skills required for industry and complemented by vocational schools between the last decade of the 19th century and 1920. The aim was not only to supply the newly emerging factories with standardised skills, but also to pacify the growing numbers of proletarian youth by getting them into a formalised training system (predominantly in-company training) complemented by school-based vocational education. Almost in parallel full-time vocational schools were established in work areas, which did not form part of the crafts or industrial training system of skilled labour such as social work or health care. Conceptualised as a complementary structure to the industry-based dual training system, these schools were targeted to provide a decent vocational education for young girls to prepare them for their role as housewives or governess or other jobs in personal services in case they were seeking gainful employment. From this tradition developed a school-based vocational training system that mainly covers skills formation for the major social, educational and medical professions such as child-care, nursing, elderly care, speech therapy, physiotherapy, and so on. This route comprises, overall, more than 100 professional domains which to date remain female dominated.

While the school-based vocational routes are also dual in nature in terms of the training covering theoretical and (though reduced) practical (work-based) components, they differ from the approximately 350 dual apprenticeship schemes in that they are not equally standardised and nationally regulated by the Vocational Training Act (*Berufsbildungs-gesetz*). Rather, school-based vocational routes are regulated at the federal level and display non-standardised and fairly heterogeneous curricula and training providers, which are altogether difficult to assess, both in terms of their numbers and concepts as well as in terms of the quality of the training they provide. However, what the professions of the school-based vocational route have in common is that they are less regulated (with the exception of health care), they are anchored predominantly in personal services, they provide for restricted career development pathways and lower salaries (as compared to the male dominated professions of the dual system) ⁽¹⁶⁾ and they

⁽¹⁶⁾ Notably, also female professions prevail in the dual system, particularly crafts-based professions like hairdressing, seamstress, cook or, for the service sector, salesperson. Salaries in these professions are even lower than in the social and educational professions of the school-based vocational system.

are female professions with 70% female representation against 41% in the dual system.

Against demographic shifts and the diffusion of the service sector and knowledge economy, the school-based vocational training route has gained relative importance, attracting ever more trainees as compared to the dual system where apprenticeship numbers have slightly decreased during the past 20 years. Despite attempts to equalise school-based and apprenticeship programmes, school-based training continues to bear several disadvantages as such courses often require fees and higher entry-qualifications apart from preparing for jobs often badly paid and with low chances for professional advancement. Ultimately, the historical polarisation persists and still influences job stratification between men and women in Germany today.

4.1.2. Initial vocational education and training and the rise of the bachelor's degree

The high levels of industrial output of the German economy are linked to the comparatively high proportion of the economy based on the industrial sector, its strong orientation to the global market and the traditional high importance attached to apprenticeship, skilled work and clear occupational pathways based on the concept of *Beruf*. However, attitudes to initial vocational education and training (IVET) are changing as there is an 'academic shift in the labour market' leading to changes in companies' qualification requirements in ways detrimental to students completing IVET. These students also face competition from bachelor graduates as a consequence of the Bologna Process, which introduced a previously unfamiliar two-phase higher education structure of bachelors and masters in many European countries, including Germany, which, while the interviewees were in education and training, had a single-exit point at Diplom (Masters) level. The new qualification profiles of some three-year bachelor degrees in Germany are explicitly vocational and have been devised to be an attractive alternative for upper secondary school leavers with a general university entrance qualification (*Abitur*). The explicit intention is to recruit school leavers who previously enrolled in IVET (often apprenticeship) programmes (Hippach-Schneider et al., 2013).

However, while IVET still plays an important role in skill formation in Germany, when our interviewees left school this pathway was even more important, and was and continues to be principally organised around dual systems of firm-based training and part-time vocational education. IVET was not seen as separate from the academic pathway in that large numbers of entrants to IVET had completed their *Abitur*, which gave access to higher education. Recent figures highlight, for example, that one-fifth of all new entrants to IVET within the dual system in 2008 had completed their *Abitur* (BIBB, 2010, p. 159). This figure

is evidence of the high reputation, acceptance and attractiveness of IVET continues to enjoy in Germany, even if IVET is now faced with greater competition than in the 1980s and 1990s when our interviewees were choosing their education and training pathways. The first bachelor programmes were introduced in Germany in 2002 and this development has led to questions as to the relative standing of the vocationally oriented degree programmes compared to completion of apprenticeship or other IVET programmes, with the concern that bachelor graduates might displace the latter in the competition for skilled work in the labour market (Briedis et al., 2011).

In Germany there is a national policy objective of raising higher education participation rate to 40% from the 2007 rate of 34%. Such a policy could cause IVET to struggle to maintain its intake of high-achieving young people, which raises the issue of its future significance and potential. The consequences of the ageing of the population along with shrinking numbers in the school-age bracket are upping the competition between sectors of education for each new cohort, and may lead to a real skill shortage with far-reaching consequences for Germany (Hippach-Schneider et al., 2013).

The surveyed companies in the Hippach-Schneider et al. (2013) study seemed particularly interested in applicants who had followed pathways where both practical and academic expertise had been developed. Such expertise could be developed in several ways as individuals moved through different education, training and employment contexts, but hybrid qualifications or dual-track pathways were one route. For example, a bachelor's degree from a university of applied sciences might have substantive in-company component, mirroring the dual system of IVET. If the intention is to preserve IVET as an attractive educational pathway for high achievers in Germany, then this will necessitate increased permeability into higher education from IVET. Companies valued having people, particularly at intermediate level, with double qualifications or who had completed hybrid pathways which had both vocational and academic components. Hence, any 'academic shift' for IVET would not have to lead to subsequent traditional fulltime academic disciplinary university-level study, but could lead to forms of higher (tertiary-level) vocational education, which was combined with work or at least substantive work experience. In the longer term, and in contexts outside Germany, constraints on the further development of these hybrid pathways, combining a practical and academic orientation over an extended period, could come from insufficiently demanding initial vocational pathways or insufficient numbers of technically demanding jobs rather than any constraints from higher education in the willingness to offer such programmes.

4.1.3. Exploring further the issue of permeability between vocational education and training and higher education

The attainment of a vocational qualification in an appropriate sector does not usually give access to higher education. Some VET schools are offering, on their own initiative, additional lessons that make it possible for interested and motivated students to take an examination for the entrance qualification for universities of applied sciences at the end of their training. This qualification gives access to all universities of applied sciences in Germany. Students who complete a bachelor's degree there can proceed to master's courses at universities. On the other hand, VET students who do not take this extra examination or attend a VET school where this option is not available are excluded from all higher education programmes, even those related to their vocational domain. However, the widely discussed shortage of graduates in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) subjects has prompted universities and universities of applied sciences to strive for an increase in the number of successful students, and to reformulate their admission requirements so as to address wider target groups than in the past. But there is some scepticism as to whether the admission of vocationally qualified learners is a promising approach. Dropout rates are often over 40% and in many cases the reason is that the demands in mathematics are too high, even for students who majored in mathematics in upper secondary education, so some professors believe that many VET students with a weaker mathematical base would have even greater difficulties. For example, staff from universities of applied sciences believe that the theoretical and mathematical contents of their modules are incompatible with the more practical approach required to complete vocational learning units in VET programmes.

Recognition of vocational learning beyond the coverage of internships within traditional study programmes looks unlikely if the universities wish to stick to the contents of their programmes while at the same time the vocational orientation of the vocational learning units in VET is maintained.

Nevertheless a closer linkage of vocational and academic qualifications remains on the agenda in Germany, especially as the traditional vocational progression pathways in many areas were bounded: the *Meister* and in some areas the State-certified engineer (*Techniker*). Once you attained these qualifications traditionally you could not go any further.

One avenue to promote greater permeability is through dual study programmes where higher education institutions and industrial partners collaborate in the design and delivery of programmes which make it possible to acquire a skilled worker's qualification and a bachelor's degree side by side. Unlike the existing *Techniker* programmes these study programmes have full permeability, i.e. graduates have the opportunity to transfer to a Master's programme on completion of their dual studies.

4.1.4. Women as secondary wage earners

Apart from labour market segmentation by gender as a result of early educational stratification and gendered professions that are reproduced through the vocational education and training system, women continue to bear most of the household and family responsibilities. In Germany, this is supported by family policies that make it difficult for women with children to pursue a continued career over their life course. When looking at female labour force participation in Germany as compared to other western countries a main argument in this context focuses on the insufficient infrastructure of child-care facilities as a major obstacle for women with children to continue working. Furthermore, taxation policy to date favours married couples with a stratified income structure, taking account of the fact that when female labour force participation started to significantly increase during the 1960s and 1970s, most women engaged with part-time rather than full-time employment.

These factors, combined with gendered professional development pathways, result in women remaining the secondary wage earner in many households despite the fact that in other European countries the dual breadwinner model and other more diversified wage earner models have emerged during the past decades. As secondary wage earners women predominantly work part-time or hold other forms of atypical employment (such as mini- or midi-jobs that confines them to a maximum wage of EUR 450 or EUR 800 per month respectively), mainly to keep a high level of flexibility to combine their work with family commitments. Finally, more than 80% of the female workforce works in the service sector characterised by lower average wages, a high proportion of atypical employment and lower levels of workforce participation as compared to the sector of industry. Thus, women are disadvantaged in terms of occupational status, professional development and career progression opportunities, social benefits and, last but not least, the gender wage gap, which is higher in Germany than in most other west European countries.

4.2. German sample

4.2.1. German sample overview (those highlighted were interviewed twice)

	Pseudonym /age	Gender; status; children	Employment status	Highest qualification	Current employment
1	Michael 30s	M; single	Injobber (one euro activation job)	<i>Fachabitur</i>	In an activation programme working 32 hours per week in a museum/cultural institution; the programme involves 10 hours work-specific training per week
2	Rainer 30s	M; married; two children	Regular, full-time	<i>Realschulabschluss</i> , certified carpenter	Foreman with an automobile supplier
3	Frank 30s	M; married; two children	Regular, full-time	Certified carpenter	Janitor/maintenance man with a housing company responsible for about 95 apartments
4	Christian 30s	M; married; two children	Regular, full-time, with employer since 2003	Degree in social work (3.5 years at a <i>Fachhochschule</i> with one year practical)	Social worker/social pedagogue with public employer providing vocational guidance for young people aged 15 to 27
5	Ali 40s	M; married; one child	Regular, full-time; also temporary parliament representative	<i>Abitur</i>	Representative at the local parliament since 2008 (exempted from work with an automobile supplier)
6	Peter 40s	M; partner; two children	75% regular employment, 25% freelance	<i>Abitur</i>	IT systems administrator and freelancer
7	Roland 40s	M; married; two children	50% regular employment, 50% freelance	<i>Realschulabschluss</i> , certified electrician, <i>Meister</i> qualification	Electrician – working both as employee and self-employed
8	Paul 40s	M; partner	Self-employed	<i>Abitur</i> , certified carpenter, further qualification as <i>Gestalter im Handwerk</i>	Self-employed carpenter
9	Martin 40s	M; single	Full-time temporary employment programme	<i>Abitur</i> and certified carpenter; retraining as web-designer/electronic publisher (15 months)	Publicly funded project coordinator in a cultural institution
10	Andreas 40s	M; partner; one child	Regular, full-time currently on parental leave	Degree in mechanical engineering (<i>Fachhochschule</i>)	Technical qualification but working as a journalist since 11 years; currently on parental leave (for six months)
11	Thomas 40s	M; married; one child	Regular, full-time, with employer since	<i>Meister</i> qualification	Electrician for technical equipment and production machines
12	Nina 30s	F; married; two children	Part-time, currently on maternity leave	Certified business communication clerk	Administrative support at a regional radio station

	Pseudonym /age	Gender; status; children	Employment status	Highest qualification	Current employment
13	Andrea 30s	F; married; three children	Part-time (marginal employment of 10 hours per week)	<i>Realschulabschluss</i> , certified physiotherapist	Physiotherapist specialised in working with children with special needs
14	Brigitte 30s	F; married; one child	Permanent, full-time	<i>Berufsakademie</i>	Vocational advisor
15	Anna 30s	F; married; pregnant	Full-time temporary contract (still in the probation period)	Commercial college, certified assistant tax accountant; certified nursery teacher	Nursery teacher in a kindergarten of special education
16	Silke 40s	F; married; two children	Regular part-time and freelancing	<i>Abitur</i>	Writer for advertising texts
17	Barbara 40s	F; divorced; two children	Part-time, regular employment (29 hours per week)	Educator/nursery teacher (from former East with West-German accreditation)	Nursery teacher/pedagogue working with children with special needs
18	Sandra 40s	F; married; two children	Part-time (75%)	<i>Abitur</i> ; certified masseur and speech therapist	Speech therapist
19	Anke 40s	F; single; two children	Injobber (one euro activation job)	Completion of secondary school (<i>Realschule</i>)	In an activation programme working in a museum/cultural institution
20	Sabine 40s	F; partner	Regular, part-time (30 hours per week)	<i>Fachabitur</i> , certified pediatric nurse	Pediatric nurse in a neurological rehabilitation centre working with children, youth and adult patients
21	Fatma 40s	F; married; three children	Regular employment	<i>Hauptschulabschluss</i> , trained as furrier and certified elderly nurse	Elderly care nurse after redirecting her career in 2005 (before she worked as furrier and seemstress and for 14 years as translator)
22	Gabi 40s	F; married; two children	Regular, part-time (20 hours per week)	Bank clerk assistant <i>Sparkassenkauffrau</i>	Bank clerk
23	Karin 40s	F; partner; two children	Part-time, regular (60%)	<i>Fachabitur</i> ; further qualification as midwifery assistant	Prop master in a theatre
24	Claudia 40s	F; partner; one child	Regular, full-time	Trained bank clerk	Bank clerk/service manager
25	Britta 40s	F; single; one child	Unemployed	Gardener	Gardener, currently unemployed with some informal jobs

4.2.2. Biographical thumbnail sketches

Michael is in his 30s and works as an 'injobber' in a 'one euro' activation programme for the unemployed. After completion of secondary school (*Fachabitur*) he studied first architecture for 4.5 years and then social pedagogy for another 4.5 years, but did not complete either of these study programmes. After having quit his second study programme, Michael had two temporary jobs, working with disabled people and then as an assistant in a school, before finally becoming unemployed. While unemployed he asked to be placed in an activation programme, now having worked under this scheme in a cultural institution/museum for about two years. When the first interview was conducted, Michael was hoping to get retraining, so as to be funded to do an apprenticeship in crafts or a commercial field. He saw his job in the cultural institution as temporary, but was still working there one year later when the follow-up interview was conducted. His narrative revolves around being in search and not having found a professional direction. While initially being torn between pursuing a professional route of architecture/design and social work he is now redirecting his orientation to learn a craft or commercial trade. However, Michael remains indecisive. His transitions have all been motivated by the insight that 'this wasn't the right thing for me' and trying to seek and find something more suitable. While he is longing for stability and direction, he remains ambiguous and indecisive which ultimately prevents him from taking action and moving on.

Rainer is in his 30s, married and has two young children. He works for an automobile supplier that produces car seats. Rainer started as a trained carpenter, but did not find a job in this field after he finished his apprenticeship. Since the late 1990s the job market for carpenters was difficult Rainer redirected his career and started working for a large automobile company on a temporary contract. He stayed with his first employer for one year and started, during this time, to look for another job. Rainer has now been working with his current employer for about 12 years, starting as upholsterer (piecework), which was very hard work and stressful to then be promoted to foreman after several unsuccessful internal applications to move into administrative work. Rainer has now been working as foreman for about five years organising the shifts and work processes for about 40 workers. His narrative is focused on securing an income and own career progression: Rainer is happy where he is, but also sees himself moving further up the career ladder in the next years within the company he works for. He also says that work intensification, time pressure and shift work are aspects that make him feel being burned out sometimes. Having secure employment and a regular income to maintain the family are and have been key drivers for Rainer's career orientations.

Frank is in his 30s and trained as a carpenter for construction work (Zimmermann). After completion of the three year apprenticeship he continued with his employer, a medium size crafts business, for another 11 years interrupted only by the military service. Ten years ago, he underwent a career transition when looking for new employment, in the first place to find work that would imply higher job security and a more regular income as his job was partly seasonal. It was quite easy for him to find a new position with a large housing company as janitor. He is still with this housing company being responsible for the maintenance of 97 apartments and houses. Frank's career narrative revolves around the shift of the nature of his work (from handcraft to administration) combined with his search for stable employment and a high level of job security. In the meantime, Frank's former employer recovered and, looking back, Frank could still be working there as a carpenter. However, Frank values job security over other aspects of his work and career. He sees himself with his current employer and job until retirement if nothing unforeseen happens.

Christian is in his 30s, married and has two small children. After completion of the *Fachabitur* Christian did the civil service in an elderly care institution and another internship to obtain access to higher education (*Fachhochschulzugang*). However, Christian then had to wait for another 1.5 years before being admitted to study social work. During this period he had different temporary jobs (gardener at a graveyard, currier driver) and also went through periods of unemployment. After finishing his studies with a one year practical assistance in a school Christian started working with his current employer (public administration, municipality) as social pedagogue providing vocational guidance for young people. He has been with this employer for 10 years. His narrative revolves around drifting through a period of uncertainty for about three years during which he did not know what to do professionally and when he tried out different, mainly low skilled jobs and also experienced periods of unemployment. The decision to become a social worker was finally influenced by his parents, who are also both social workers as is his wife. Important for him in his current job are employment security, social recognition and job satisfaction. Being a temporary employee initially Christian had to struggle and be patient to become permanent.

Ali is in his 40s, a factory worker, and has been a representative for the local parliament for five years. For the duration of the full-time post he is released by his employer for this post under full guarantee of employment. After *Hauptschule* he first went to a vocational school for hotel and restaurant business since he could not get an apprenticeship. As finding work was difficult Ali spent another five years finally completing his *Abitur* (adult learning courses) and then entered university to study political science. Alongside his studies he started to work for an automobile supplier, where he ended getting a full-time unlimited contract which made him quit the university studies. He worked for this employer for about

10 years overall, moving from the warehouse to learn and train others in the introduction of SAP. He was finally in charge of applying the SAP system to the logistics of the warehouse. Ali's political career started in parallel to his job career in the 1990s. When Ali did the civil service in an elderly care institution he became interested in social issues and became engaged with a political party, where he assumed ever more responsibilities over the years up to his current full-time representative assignment. Ali's career narrative revolves around the 'double' career pathways which over the years both developed coincidentally and unsystematically. Ali says that he never planned either of these careers and regards himself as somebody who takes chances, has many interests and a high learning affinity. While his post at the local parliament is likely to come to an end he is relaxed about possible future employment opportunities. Although he liked his former job with the automobile supplier, he does not see himself going back there. Rather he sees himself in a completely new professional area such as cultural or media business.

Peter is in his 40s and lives together with his partner and two children. He describes himself as an IT systems administrator. Currently he works 75% as an employee in the public sector and 25% freelance. During the 1990s, after having completed the *Abitur* and the civil service as emergency medical assistant, Peter studied several subjects ranging from political and social sciences to public law and informatics. However, he never completed any of these courses, but decided in 2000 to start working as a freelance IT consultant. While studying, but also already starting from the age of 12, he trained himself in the different IT fields up to a point where he could consider himself expert enough to find customers. When the family moved to another city he gave up his consultancy work and started working part-time as an IT technician in the public sector. Considerations for this shift were family commitments and job security. Peter plans to stick to his current employment arrangement for the coming years despite some dissatisfying aspects. One is accepting a considerably lower income because he has no formal degree in informatics. His career narrative revolves around taking chances and balancing work and family interests that lead to accommodating compromises at different stages of his life.

Roland is in his 40s, married, has two young children and has been working as self-employed electrician for about nine years. Last year he arranged with a colleague to combine his self-employment with a regular part-time position as electrician working as employee 20 hours per week. Roland trained as electrician after completion of the *Realschulabschluss*, then worked for three years with an oil refinery interrupted by the civil service in a social institution. The social experience led to Roland doing the *Abitur* with a specialisation in social work (*Fachhochschulreife Sozialwesen*). He then travelled for five months through New Zealand. When he returned he worked for a small electricians craft company

and then did his *Meister* qualification. In parallel Roland started to work as assembly fitter for wind energy sites (Germany wide) and gradually started his own business. Roland's career narrative revolves around trying out different things as working as an electrician has never been his dream job. Also in his job he is exploring different fields and new directions which, overall, implied a considerable number of job changes and transitions. Today, Roland successfully runs his own business and also sees himself there in the future. However, he has been seeking to do other things or combine his job with deepening some personal interests (e.g. in the field of sustainable and wind energy). For the future Roland would like to explore other opportunities in his professional field including working in a different country.

Paul is in his 40s and works as self-employed carpenter. After completion of secondary education (*Abitur*) he spent about seven years with different temporary jobs, including working for 1.5 years at a children's theatre and in a call centre of the regional transportation company. Paul was already 27 when he finally started an apprenticeship as carpenter. He stayed on as trained carpenter with the same carpenter's shop for another four years. Paul then followed a two-year full-time handicraft design school. This further qualification (*ausgebildeter Gestalter im Handwerk*, i.e. certified craft designer) was publicly funded by with the *MeisterBafög*. Doing the *Meister* would have been the alternative, but Paul opted for the school-based qualification route. In any case, the aim was to become self-employed afterwards and open his own workshop. In the end, however, Paul found out that this qualification did not allow him to start his own carpentry business (which to date requires the *Meister* qualification) so, as an alternative, Martin started a business for assembly (*Montagebetrieb*), which has gradually transformed into a carpenter's business during the last years. In the first interview, Paul's career narrative focused on the transition from dependent employment to self-employment and the formal and financial obstacles, lack of guidance and lack of support. Both interviews were structured around around the ambivalence of being self-employed in a one man business and the notion that carpentry was not really his first professional choice, but rather presented a compromise, which is difficult for Paul to come to terms with. He keeps exploring and is still struggling to find something or a work arrangement that matches his interests, skills, personality and desire for flexibility and creativity.

Martin is in his 40s and did a three-year apprenticeship as carpenter after completion of *Abitur*. After his apprenticeship he worked for six months as a carpenter in Egypt and earned quite a lot of money, which he could partly live on later on as a student. After having worked overseas Martin started to study design as drawing had always been his hobby. However, as his girlfriend was working in fashion design, Martin started to work together with her and at some point quit his studies to become a self-made fashion designer. He and his

girlfriend ran their own fashion business for 12 years fairly successfully until his partner died. Since Martin could not run the business on his own he had to close it down. In this period of crisis he lost his business, his job and his partner. It was a friend's mother who made him undergo a 15-month retraining as electronic publisher/web designer that she also financed. After the retraining, Martin found work with a start-up IT company where he worked for 2.5 years. He was finally deployed being the oldest employee in the firm. Martin then was unemployed for about four years, then worked for a friend's company doing some graphical work for about three years and then back into unemployment. He got depression and fell ill. Three years later, Martin was placed in a cultural institution in the framework of an activation programme where he was working when the first and also the follow-up interview were conducted. Major issues of Martin's narrative involve: career redirections complexly interrelated with personal crisis and illness and depressions during longer periods of unemployment. While Martin's future work directions remain uncertain he is aware of his talents and creative potentials and that he has also had a successful career history. He is building up new confidence, seeking to get back into regular employment as working is very central for him.

Andreas is in his 40s, went to school and trained in the former East, finishing education after 13 years with a combined *Abitur* and certificate as trained machine assembly technician (or plant fitter). He worked for some time, completed the military service and started studying mechanical/production engineering, knowing already that he never wanted to work in a technical field. He finished his degree, but wanted to do something different and started working as a (badly paid) freelancer for a small regional newspaper, then completed a two-year trainee programme shortly after and finished as editorial journalist (all in a small town in the new federal States). Andreas then searched for a new job as journalist in the West, mainly because he wanted to leave the East. He started working for a small newspaper in the north of Germany, changed again to a bigger newspaper and was one of the last in this sector to get a regular, permanent contract. He has now been working for this newspaper for 10 years. His narrative revolves around the transition from a technical profession in the East (only option then) to become a journalist and move to the West and about this opportunity only having become possible due to the reunification. He described this period as a time of being in search and crisis.

Thomas is an electronic technician with a *Meister* qualification working for a large company in the food industry. He is in charge of maintaining the technical equipment and production machines. Before he changed to his current employer, for which he has now been working for about 20 years, he has had two other employers, a medium size company where he started his apprenticeship and a large galvanising factory where he worked for about four years. About 11 years

ago he was put on a career track by his supervisor to become team leader based on the requirement of completing the *Meister* qualification. Pursuing the *Meister* was suggested and supported by Thomas' employer. While Thomas himself never pursued advancing in his career to a managerial position, today he is glad that he made this move, which for him has been the most decisive transition so far. Thomas' career narrative presents a typical German male progressive technicians career that was backed up by his employer and his wife, who mainly took care of the child while Thomas was undergoing the *Meister* qualification alongside working. Thomas likes his job and regards how his career has evolved as unproblematic. Since he never had any particular career ambitions he thinks that he has been lucky with his employer who promoted him. He sees himself remaining with this employer for the rest of his working life, but in case of an unexpected career change (e.g. due to rationalisation) Thomas thinks that it would be easy for him to find new employment based on his advanced and solid qualification and long work experience.

Nina is in her 30s, married and has two small children. During the first interview she was on maternity leave (for one year) with her second child and had a few more weeks before getting back to work. During the second interview she had been back at her former workplace since about six months. After having obtained the *Realschulabschluss* Nina did an apprenticeship as business communications clerk at a regional radio and television station. She continued with this employer for another two years before following her partner to another major city about 300 km away. Before moving she sought new employment at another regional radio and television station at the new location, but changed from an office job to work as editorial assistant. She stayed in this position until having her first child. As Nina decided to continue part-time, she was switched back to the office where she has been doing pension schemes until she went on maternity leave with her second child. She returned to this same workplace after the maternity leave. Nina's career narrative revolves around balancing a strong work orientation and family life in a fairly traditional way, accommodating the career of her husband by working part-time and having switched to less challenging work. There is a clear family priority, but at the same time a clearly expressed work dedication. Work thereby fulfils a social, networking and recognition function rather than securing an income. Nina seeks stable and continuous employment and a job she likes, but without having any particular career or learning ambitions for the future.

Andrea is in her 30s, married and lives together with her husband and three young children. After completion of secondary education she did one year in a vocational school for social work before being old enough to enter the three-year physiotherapist training programme, which she successfully completed. She has since then worked as a physiotherapist, first for four years full-time and, after

having had her first child, part-time. Her part-time employment has mainly been marginally, i.e. earning less than EUR 400 per months. However, alongside Andrea pursued several major specialisation courses, most recently to specialise in child physiotherapy. Her narrative revolves around balancing work and family life by at the same time deepening her own expertise to become more specialised to work in areas she is interested in. This is in line with following a clear professional track. During the first interview a major goal was to increase her working hours from 40 to 60 hours per months which she had realised when the second interview was conducted.

Brigitte is in her 30s, married with one child. She lives and was schooled in a medium-size town in the former East. As she finished school shortly before the reunification, new career opportunities opened up and Brigitte went to a *Berufsakademie* specialising in commerce and economics. After a fairly difficult period of entering the labour market into stable employment, which involved working for a small firm, being unemployed, undergoing a specialist training of nine months and going on maternity leave for one year, Brigitte started working for the local employment agency, first at the service desk to then gradually move into the position of vocational advisor. During the last 10 years she has changed positions four times before getting to her current job. While these last job changes had all been with the same employer, it involved risk taking and engagement with significant learning. Brigitte sees her career as progressively advancing against her own strategic approach and having confidence in her skills, but also risk taking and having been lucky a couple of times. She might consider moving on, but at this point in time feels that she still needs to give priority to her family. At the same time she recognises that further promotion would be highly competitive and would require significant input in terms of learning and time commitment she is not ready for at the moment and she may also not want in the future. At the time of the second interview Brigitte had reduced her working time to 80%. It was in light of work-life balance and initially for a period of one year. Interestingly, the reduction of working time was a result of own reflections initiated through the first interview.

Anna is in her 30s, married and works as nursery teacher in a special needs kindergarten. She quit the Gymnasium and finished, instead, a commercial school/college. Afterwards Anna completed an apprenticeship as a tax accountant assistant and worked, after completion, for one year in this job but mainly to earn some money to undergo another two years training as a nursery teacher (one year shorter than usual as some community work Anna had been doing voluntarily was accredited as prior learning). She then worked for five years with a faith-based youth association, then for four years in a kindergarten. When the first interview was conducted she had just started with her current employer, which is a kindergarten for disturbed and disabled children. Key experiences of

transition for Anna have been the career change from tax consultant to nursery teacher, which was greatly supported by her parents. The narrative revolves around striving for a permanent and stable employment situation as Anna always had temporary contracts, which are common in the educational field. Although with growing work experience Anna has become more confident in getting her contracts renewed, this element of insecurity still makes her feel uncomfortable. During the first interview Anna was pregnant, while during the second interview she had just been given birth and was on maternity leave. Her employment contract was about to end and she was not sure whether her employer would keep her and that she could return to her former workplace after the parental leave. During both interviews employment insecurity and new challenges and insecurities due to her new family situation emerged as a dominant theme. While the employer indicated that he would like to renew Anna's contract it was also made clear that she cannot go back to her former workplace but will likely be assigned to a new, probably part-time position.

Silke is in her 40s, is married and has two children. She works as an advertising text writer in a combination of regular part-time employment of 16 hours per week (two days) and about the equivalent as a freelancer. The freelance work is irregular and flexible. After completion of the *Abitur* Silke started some university courses initially wanting to become a teacher, but quit after three years to start a trainee programme for advertising texts. She has remained in this profession ever since (by now for about 16 years) but in different employment arrangements and with varying clients and employers. For the last 10 years she is working with her current employer. During the first years she worked full-time which in her profession means working 50 to 60 hours per week. For the regular employment Silke is commuting two days per week of 200 km distance each way. Silke considers that she was just lucky getting into this profession relying on her talents. She mainly trained on the job, initially through her supervisor, who was also a mentor. As most of Silke's learning has been training on-the-job she feels that she missed out obtaining some basic skills that would be useful in her daily work. She is still improvising in many aspects. Silke's narrative revolves around learning at work and not having had enough time for the children and being stretched between work and the family. She is very self-disciplined and still exploring new avenues. Networking and (lack of) exchange with peers emerged as a dominant theme.

Barbara is in her 40s, divorced and is now a single mother with two children. She schooled in the former East and trained there as nursery teacher/child care provider, which back in the DDR was a higher education training programme. It was the year of the reunification (1989) when Barbara finished her training and took the opportunity to look for a job in the West (but continued to live in her home town in the border area for another couple of years). Alongside her first job

in a kindergarten she also did the six-month conversion course to obtain the equivalent West-German certificate as educator/nursery teacher. After three years in the kindergarten Barbara started looking for a new professional challenge and switched to work in a hotel, first cleaning and then at the reception. After about two years Barbara moved to live with her partner and found a new job in her former profession working for an orphanage. After one year Barbara quit because she found shift work too stressful and also realised that the orphanage was not for her. She thus looked for a new job and has now been working with an institution caring for children with special needs since 15 years. Due to her child care responsibilities she has worked part-time (29 hours per week) for the last years. A major transition period was the reunification which made career considerations being secondary compared to all other areas of life. The narrative also revolves around being the breadwinner but also looking for challenging work and learning. Barbara stressed that working with special needs children provides her with sufficient challenges in her job and that this is something she likes very much.

Sandra is in her 40s and married. She completed secondary education with the *Abitur* and afterwards spent about two years doing different jobs, travelling and also studying at university for a couple of months until starting a two-year training programme to become a masseur. She worked as masseur with different employers for four years knowing that actually she wanted to do something else. At that time, Sandra had her first child, another one three years later so that she stayed home for some years until she decided to pursue another qualification as speech therapist. During this period Sandra also started a course programme for alternative medicine, which, however, she never fully completed. To qualify as speech therapist she was lucky to get into a three year retraining programme so that she could start in her new profession, first full-time and then, for the last seven years, part-time (75%). Sandra's narrative revolves around seeking to establish continuity in her working life, which was partly in parallel with building a family. Starting afresh in a new profession was also a result of the health problems of her husband that made clear that Sandra will become the breadwinner in the longer term. Currently, she is considering building on the courses she did in alternative medicine, because this is something that really interests her. However, financial restrictions and the learning involved are major obstacles in her current situation.

Anke is in her 40s. After completing secondary school she initially wanted to do an apprenticeship in a commercial field but then decided to go straight into automobile manufacturing, assembling parts as there she could earn more money. Cars were then her fairly expensive hobby. Overall, she was working for different suppliers for about 25 years (mainly piecework) also in different regions of the country. During this time she undertook different specialist trainings, mostly

employer directed as the employer recognised that Anke was interested in the technical field. She also completed a distance learning study course in electrical engineering. She mostly changed jobs in pursuit of earning more money (she herself describes it as money addiction), finally moving to a main city in the former eastern part of Germany to work for a company that produced medical supplies. This job was very hard and Anke worked a lot of extra hours, eventually up to 22 hours non-stop to make more money. She neglected her children over working. Her plan had always been to stop working at the age of 50 and emigrate to Canada. About five years ago she had a burnout and had to stop working altogether. Since then she started to live on her savings she had accrued to emigrate to Canada. At some point, Anke was admitted to a psychiatric clinic for nine months while her children moved to their father. During the first interview Anke was in an activation programme working in a cultural institution. She extended this job because she likes it as she learns a lot about herself. At the time of the follow-up interview she was still in the same activation scheme with the same institution. She said that she will never be able to go back into technical work but is now doing technical stuff more as a hobby. Her narrative in both interviews focused on how to learn leading a 'normal' life, respecting the work-life balance and her own limits and interests and building up a 'normal' relationship with her now grown-up daughters.

Sabine is in her 40s and single. She has been working as paediatric nurse with the same employer in a rehabilitation centre all her working life, for now over 23 years, but in three different positions. The dominant theme for changing jobs and pursuing specific employment arrangements has been working hours with an orientation towards balancing work and private life. For the last 19 years Sabine has been working part-time (although being single) and has thus managed to achieve, in her view, a privileged permanent position where she works day shifts only and the desired number of hours (30 hours per week). However, she has tried several times to redirect her career to specialise as a speech therapist, but has not been successful due to formal obstacles, in particular the non-accreditation of prior learning. She assesses that her stable and privileged employment position has been the main reason why she finally never completed other career and learning pathways she started. The narrative here is that structural conditions (secure employment versus insecure job perspectives and restrictions due to formal requirements) combined with lack of support have been major obstacles to professional development and 'moving on'. Thus, despite encountering dissatisfaction with work, the wish to keep her stable employment has locked her into the current position.

Fatma came from Turkey to Germany with her parents while she was still at school. She had to repeat two classes due to language barriers and graduated at the age of 18 from *Hauptschule* to then undergo a three-year training as a furrier.

She worked in this profession until having her first child. Then she worked as a seamstress for two years before having twins. Fatma then went into translation, working as a translator for public institutions (e.g. at the court), achieving a translation certificate alongside working. She very successfully worked as a translator for about 14 years with short periods of interruptions. As the translation work involved a lot of travelling, Fatma wanted to change her career and do something else. After a one year orientation phase and an internship in an elderly care institution Fatma decided to undergo another three year training programme as an elder care nurse which she completed five years ago. Since then she has been working in this profession. Fatma's career narrative revolves around accommodating a strong work orientation with family commitments and traditional role models. Fatma always went back to work soon after maternity leave, always finding herself in a new job. The redirections of her career always involved a high commitment to learning and training on the job. That she could realise her working life despite her family responsibilities has been possible through the support of her family (her mother, brother and husband).

Gabi is in her 40s, married, has two children and works in the local bank branch. She has been working with this bank for 20 years, but in different branches in the region. Before having her children she had worked full-time for 10 years. Then Gabi stayed home with the kids for six years and went back to work with the same employer, since then being employed part-time (50%). She lives in a small town in the new federal States (former East) and trained there under the old system as *Wirtschaftskaufmann DDR*. To keep her job Gabi had to undergo a retraining/re-accreditation course of nine months to get the equivalent West German certificate as *Sparkassenkauffrau*. With this qualification she finds herself at the lower end of career options in the bank and has remained at the service point/referral desk ever since. She also does not see herself moving up, because there is much competition from younger, more highly qualified colleagues and Gabi herself would neither have the energy nor the resources to undergo another major retraining. However, Gabi would like to work more hours to be more involved at work, but needs to give priority to her family. Gabi's career narrative is clearly structured along giving priority to and supporting the career of her partner and accommodating family commitments, thus her own career interests and ambitions being secondary. This combines with a competitive work environment where Gabi does not see that she can ever improve her current position. She thus, in the first place, seeks to balance work and family life and regards herself as the balancing factor in her family.

Karin is in her 40s. She left secondary school without a certificate to work with children for one year, but then decided to go back to school and complete the *Fachabitur* specialising in textiles. She then entered the *Fachhochschule* trying out different course combinations (education, textiles, sports, German

language) and worked in parallel in different jobs. After four years Karin quit her studies, moved to another town, joined a programme to train as midwife, but quit after three months because she became pregnant. She then stayed home with her children for the following eight years. To get back into work Karin visited a vocational orientation seminar and was finally placed to work with a restorer in a museum and did this for 1.5 years before moving through private contacts to do an internship at the theatre working as prop master. During this time Karin continued to receive unemployment benefits, but took up different temporary jobs in this field until seven years ago she started to work as a freelancer. With prop mastery being registered as a crafts business (but not being equally regulated like a *Beruf*), Karin got a title from the chamber of crafts and permission to work as a freelancer. Then, a year later, she got a 60% permanent position at the local theatre where she still works. Her narrative revolves around being in search of what to do professionally and trying out different things, not to make a career, but to combine work with self-fulfilment.

Claudia is in her 40s and lives with her partner and her grown-up step son. After completion of secondary education (*Realschule*) Claudia trained as bank clerk and worked in this profession for 22 years altogether in a secure and well-paid position. Despite some obstacles, she was able to make a middle-ranged career at the bank. At some point in time she decided to do her university entry qualification in evening classes (*Abitur*) and then study languages and journalism while Claudia also continued working part-time at the bank, mainly to finance her studies. After she completed the university courses Claudia redirected her career to work in the area of marketing and public relations. After she initially had worked for two small IT firms she changed to work for a large logistics association. When the first interview was conducted she had been working there as a service manager, which she found interesting but also very challenging. When the second interview was conducted Claudia had had a burn out and had, after having been in a clinic for some time, stopped working altogether. She was then in the process of getting a new professional orientation and very eager to get back into regular employment.

Britta is in her 40s, a single mother living with her teenage son. She trained as a gardener and worked as a gardener and florist for some years. At some point she decided to do the *Abitur* through adult education courses to obtain university entry qualification and study. Subsequently she followed university courses in languages and cultural studies for six years, but eventually had her child and never completed her study courses. When the first interview was conducted Britta had been unemployed for a considerable period of time living on the unemployment benefits complemented by some additional income through occasional and informal jobs. At the time of the first interview she was in a one year qualification programme financed by the employment agency. When the

follow-up interview was conducted she had completed the training, of which she found the IT training component and the three-month internship most useful. Her employment situation, however, had not changed. Britta has, over the years, developed a learner identity or learner career, compensating a regular job with a series of formal and informal trainings and training programmes. In her view, trainings help her to reflect upon her own situation. In terms of time flexibility she regards the training programmes also to be more compatible with her responsibilities as a single mother than a regular job.

4.3. Representation of the career journeys of the German sample

The following cases have been chosen to represent examples of several different types of career journeys of the interviewees in the German sample.

4.3.1. Michael, 30s, injobber – still unsure of his place and role in the labour market after 15 years

Michael works as injobber, which means he is in a 'one euro' activation programme for the unemployed. He started but did not complete two study programmes (architecture and social pedagogy) due partly to difficulties with self-organisation. Rather, he needs to rely on clear structures and pre-structured work settings. Michael had two different temporary jobs, working with disabled and then as an assistant in a school, lastly almost five years, before becoming unemployed. He had developed a useful skill set and he probably could have extended his last job with the school, but he did not want to continue in this job mainly because he found the interaction with the parents very difficult. While unemployed he asked to be placed in an activation programme, now working under this scheme in a cultural institution/museum. Michael is now hoping to get a retraining funded to do an apprenticeship in crafts or a commercial field.

Michael's narrative revolves around being in search and not having found a professional direction. While initially being torn between pursuing a professional route of architecture/design and social work he is now redirecting his orientation to learning a crafts or commercial trade. Ultimately, Michael remains indecisive. His transitions have all been motivated by the insight that 'this wasn't the right thing for me' and trying to seek and find something else more suitable.

4.3.1.1. Contextualisation

The interview was conducted at Michael's workplace and lasted for 40 minutes. Overall, Michael was fairly disillusioned about how his work biography and career had developed thus far and was also not too optimistic about possible future developments. He presented a fairly depressed picture. It was difficult to get a

narrative going so that the interview became more structured and guided by posing and answering questions.

4.3.1.2. *Work biography*

Michael completed basic schooling (*Hauptschule*, then *Realschule*) then continued to *Fachabitur* with a specialisation in design, did his civil service in an elderly care institution to then follow two full study programmes (first architecture and then social pedagogy at the *Fachhochschule*, lasting nine years altogether) without completing either of these two study courses. Michael left the *Fachhochschule* without any certificate and still not knowing what he wanted to be doing professionally, he decided to look for a job to find out, maybe by means of practical work experience, what to do. His first job was in a social institution working with severely disabled individuals, initially on a fixed-term contract which was extended to 3.5 years. After that Michael started in a school where he, for one year, was responsible for one particular child who displayed behavioural problems. Subsequently, Michael became unemployed since the child changed schools – and because he did not want to continue this type job, mainly because Michael found it difficult to meet the parents' expectations. The communication and interaction with the parents was also difficult. Apart from that he perceived the school environment and the interaction with the child as a positive experience.

Michael says that the year of being unemployed was not too bad, because he had time to think about a possible professional route.

From being unemployed Michael was placed in a cultural programme, a city museum that tells about the history of the city by means of contextualised drama sequences, as part of an activation programme. Here Michael assumes a broad variety of responsibilities and tasks that require a high degree of flexibility. Michael is fairly pleased with his current job, despite it being largely unpaid and forming part of an activation programme. He is mainly at the cashier, thus often serving as the main contact point for visitors. However, he also recognises that this job constitutes a transitory situation from which he benefits and where he learns a lot, but which does not provide any long term perspective. He feels it is ok for the time being but if he was to stay on it would be a waste of time. Therefore, Michael decided to strive to apply for a retraining/an apprenticeship to train as commercial clerk in health care. Michael has already visited the institution which offers the training and in principle he got green light from his employment agent to be placed in the retraining programme. However, in reality it will be difficult to meet the deadline since when the interview was conducted there were only a few more weeks left to go through the application process. The programme always starts on 1st May, so he only has the chance to get into this programme once a year. If it does not work out this year, Michael will have to wait

for another year or find something else to do. He got the idea for undergoing this particular training programme when attending a job fair.

4.3.1.3. *Transitions*

The most significant transition for Michael has been to finally realise that studying was not the right thing for him to do and to finally quit – after having been a student for nine years and having been following two different study programmes. He found it extremely hard to get up in the mornings, take exams, organise his courses, etc., and thought that maybe it would be easier to just be in regular employment where somebody tells him when to arrive and what to do. Michael took this decision by himself, not really communicating this idea and exchanging about this decision with his parents or friends. However, his social network reacted quite positively as family and friends were aware of the difficulties Michael had with his studies that sometimes resulted in periods of depressions. He recognises that in this period some professional advice and guidance would have been helpful. Eventually, Michael consulted the psychological guidance service of the *Fachhochschule*, but in his view this was not very helpful. The main advice given was that Michael should seek psychiatric help, looking for a therapist. This means they diagnosed the problems to be personal rather than structural.

4.3.1.4. *Emerging themes*

Self-organisation

Working, being integrated into a work environment and having a structured working day worked better for Michael than studying. He actually liked his two temporary jobs and felt confident in working in the area of social work and also with disabled people. However, in terms of emotional involvement he found it too hard and had problems of ‘caring too much’ and getting emotionally too involved. This he considered to have been the main reason why he discontinued in this field, and finally let these jobs go without seeking to renew his contracts.

Learning from transitions

The transitions and discontinuities Michael experienced were in several ways self-initiated as he decided to quit (in the case of the two study programmes he underwent) or discontinue (in the case of his two temporary jobs) what he was doing. One issue here is that he considered that the contexts and structures he was involved in did not work for him. Another issue seems to be not having defined clear aims and objectives for himself (this, however, was not clearly stated). For example, Michael started studying architecture because this was the unfulfilled dream of his father – and since the father could not realise this dream

Michael did it in his place, but then recognised that architecture did not work for him, neither in terms of the study courses nor in terms of possible future tasks and job profiles.

Another issue is losing sight of objectives along the way. For example, initially Michael started to study social pedagogy as a route into studying psychology (the direct route was not possible for him with a *Fachabitur*).

Altogether Michael always has been and still is in search of finding a suitable learning and career path for himself. To date he is not sure what he wants to be doing professionally despite having been trying several different routes. Michael recognises that self-organisation, or rather the difficulties he has with organising his ideas, learning and working life, are major obstacles.

Overall, some conflicts or disparities emerged during the interview. For example, it is quite obvious that Michael's career narrative revolves around being in search of finding or determining his own professional direction. On the other hand, Michael recognises that he often wasted time by sticking to what he was doing despite knowing that it was not the right thing and he would not like to work in this area in the future. His advice to friends would be to follow their career desires rather than compromising or accommodating or give priority to employment security, for example.

4.3.1.5. *Learning*

Michael's current job involves a training component of about 12 hours per week. Every day he has two to four hours of training, which Michael enjoys quite a lot. The training involves how to provide services, drama lessons, rhetoric, dancing, the history related to the museum, training as city soldier, etc. It is all related to his current work roles. Learning by doing and site-by-site learning are the most preferred modes of learning for him.

For the future, Michael would like to undergo a retraining programme or apprenticeship to train as commercial clerk in health care (*Kaufmann im Gesundheitswesen*). The main hope and objective here is to finally get a regular job with regular office hours, coming and leaving, having clear structures and where there is not anything that Michael will need to take home with. This is something he has been longing for a long time, having a clearly structured work routine with clear expectations from all parties involved. However, the commercial clerk in health care is also just a compromise as Michael would rather learn a crafts trade (such as carpenter) but this retraining programme will not be financed. The argument here is that there are no good job opportunities for carpenters. Ultimately, the employment agency only finances training and retraining programmes that promise good future job opportunities, i.e. in the areas where there is a demand for skilled workers.

As concerns the alternative route, i.e. going out and trying to get an apprenticeship contract through self-initiative, Michael states that he feels too old and that he does not have any chance due to his age. Thus, he prefers to rely on being placed via the employment agency.

4.3.1.6. *Follow-up interview: March 2013*

Main development

Some internal promotion within the institution, but job situation remained unchanged

Transition processes:

(a) Theme 1: change of status

When the second interview was conducted Michael was still in the same institution, but under a different scheme, i.e. he had shifted from the activation programme to work there under the programme of federal volunteer service (the new scheme that replaced the former civil service in Germany). This implies a shift from his former unemployment status to a volunteer status with a little bit more income and higher benefits. In terms of training it also means that Michael is no longer required, but also no longer entitled to follow the training schemes provided by the unemployment agency. While Michael is glad to be released from these training requirements it was clarified in the interview that ultimately the volunteer status was above all a formal arrangement to keep him in the institution as he had no alternative employment opportunities. The federal volunteer service is based on a one year contract with the option to renew it for another year.

(b) Theme 2: change of tasks and responsibilities

Another part of the interview focused on his current working situation and how he perceived the shift of responsibilities in his job as he had been promoted to team leader during the last year. He stated that if someone is reliable and responsible it is quite easy to become a team leader. In this position Michael is mostly responsible for administrative tasks like organising the shifts and duties of other colleagues, for example rearranging the shifts if colleagues become ill. While he became bored with his work as a cashier, he perceives this to be the more interesting job, in fact for him the most interesting job of all within the institution. On the other hand, Michael also stated that he gets very bored with his job. He could not really specify why he was bored or what made him being bored. He sees this as part of the institution and that work processes are not sufficiently structured and organised, but also because the institution employs partly difficult and very

heterogeneous personalities. Michael also rationalised that he has now probably been working there for too long and that the job had turned from a learning experience to a personal strain from which derives a feeling of general dissatisfaction. At the same time he also underlined that with moving around he also learns new things which he likes. But these learning experiences are not directed towards a particular goal or professional aim, which he perceives as discouraging. Then he underlined again that also in terms of learning he benefits from the flexibility inbuilt in his current job. 'Well, but in terms of learning the job is better than just doing nothing. Then I might as well work in the assembly line. It is not that I just want to have a job or any kind of job. The aim would be to have a, well, a satisfying job, to have an experience of job satisfaction or at least some kind of contentment. Here at least I am lucky that I can choose another area of work if I have to do things I don't like or when it doesn't work out. This of course would be different in a regular type of employment. Here I can try out different things and I have to find out what I really like doing and what I can put up with and then I can probably choose a retraining [programme]'.

Overall, Michael displayed ambivalence towards his current job and learning situation, but also towards all other employment and working options, be it his job at the local school, the perspective of undergoing a retraining programme or the possibility of maybe moving on to other seasonal work.

- (c) Theme 3: getting a retraining approved (was also a key theme of first interview)

Michael stated that during the last year he has still been waiting for a retraining scheme to be approved. The retraining turned out to be not really specified, but just denominated to fall into a commercial field. Some parts of the interview focused on how he perceived the administrative structures and processes as slow, obstructing and effective obstacles as his application for retraining was not being processed. He complained about the inefficient structures and blamed the institutions for not being supportive. However, at the same time Michael himself has basically been waiting for a reply to his request rather than having been proactive himself. Another aspect is that even if the retraining scheme was being approved, Michael still needs to find an employer. He sees his chances for actually finding a firm where he can undergo the retraining as fairly limited.

- (d) Theme 4: other activities and occasional jobs

Michael continued to work 30 hours per week in the institution with having one day off per week. That is, he negotiated to work four days eight hours per day instead of six hours five days per week to have a day off, which he now spends at a local primary school teaching computer classes in the mornings. While he is teaching a technical subject this job somehow

connects to his former jobs (and studies) as social pedagogue as this school has a high proportion of migrant pupils who hardly speak German and who come from a difficult social background. Michael really likes this job and interacting with the children, but also because he has a technical interest in computers. In addition to his teaching job he has other occasional jobs here and there. One example he mentioned was to help at a job fair, assembling and dismantling booths among other tasks. Since he often feels bored with his current job, these other occasional jobs are very important for him. He mostly gets such jobs through his social networks.

(e) Theme 5: support structures

Michael has always received and still is receiving substantial support from his parents and family. His parents still support him financially (at some point it came up that maybe his parents' support and lack of pressure to find a job and become financially independent could be one reason why he still has no concrete professional aims). He also gets a lot of personal and emotional support from his sister, his girl-friend and other friends. In his self-perception Michael thinks that a lot of people of his generation (not clear which generation this is – perhaps the generation of the 1980s) find themselves in a similar situation like Michael: they are drifting professionally, they do not have concrete aims and ambitions and apparently many of his friends are highly qualified but unemployed. In Michael's words they have difficulties to grow up and take responsibility for their own life.

(f) Theme 6: future perspectives

Michael said that if the retraining is not being approved within the coming weeks he is planning to quit the volunteer service and seek seasonal work at one of the Nordic islands, maybe as service staff or in the restaurant business. He said that he would be indifferent as concerns the concrete job since it would be just for six months or so (over the summer) and it would be well paid. He said that he intended to do this already last year but waiting for the retraining to be approved made him stay on. The reason was that once getting seasonal work he would not be entitled any more to undergo a retraining programme.

4.3.1.7. *Interpretation*

Against his different learning and work experiences Michael underwent during the past 15 years he remains ambivalent and without direction. He rationalised that he has a problem with self-organisation, being focused and defining a clear direction for himself and is thus seeking to work along external, simple structures. While he stated that this would work better for him, in practice he has also not been successful in working in a more structured environment for a longer period of time. In his interpretation one reason was that he became bored easily. This

experience of boredom, however, remained unspecified in various ways. While he really enjoys his job at the school he finds social work personally too exhausting. For example, the school environment is too noisy. His mother in fact is a teacher so he knows the positive sides of this profession, but also the downsides of it. Also other contradictions came up, for example when he said 'if it is just to earn some money the job itself is not really important', but also 'I do these occasional jobs because they are fun'. A fun orientation has so far directed Michael's working life, but now he wants predictability and stability.

Overall, Michael has been drifting, trying out different things, jumping from one thing to the next but remained ambivalent. This can be identified to be the pattern of his learning and work trajectory. On the one hand, he has high expectations in terms of having a satisfying, challenging and interesting job, which, however, on the other hand cannot be too demanding or stressful. Boredom was the key word that came up in both interviews very frequently. At the same time he has problems with persisting in doing things. When asked what would be his ideal job he also remained unclear and indecisive. Interestingly, Michael displayed a high level of self-reflexivity while at the same time being partly unrealistic about his own dispositions. For example, he stated that he would be totally sure that if he got into a retraining programme he would definitely complete it. However, from his former experiences this could be questioned.

Michael partly justified his situation in flux by saying that this was a problem of his generation, which has difficulties in growing up and taking responsibility for their own life. Apparently, he shares his experience with friends and peers of his age. While being aware of his strength and weaknesses (self-discipline versus external structures) another dominant pattern was blaming others for his work and life situation which he sought to see in a positive light, too, but which also carries the notion of a profound dissatisfaction.

It is almost as if Michael does feel he needs a sense of *Beruf* and belonging – just having a job and performing a useful role was insufficient. Structurally society labels the job in the same way: a temporary job to be filled by those making their way towards more permanent positions.

Although Michael continues in his extended transition, his extended transition is very different from those of his contemporaries in Spain or Italy. In those countries his contemporaries often have difficulty on getting on routes which have prospects of leading to a more stable position. Here for most of his transition Michael was on routes leading to further opportunities it was just that, three times, Michael decided he was on the wrong path and changed his orientation.

4.3.2. Rainer, 30s, upholsterer

Rainer works for an automobile supplier that produces car seats. Rainer started as a trained carpenter but did not find a job in this field after he finished his apprenticeship. He stayed with his first employer for one year and started, during this time, to look for another job. Rainer has now been working with his current employer for about 12 years, starting as upholsterer (piecework), which was very hard work and stressful to then be promoted to foreman after several unsuccessful internal applications to move into more administrative work. Rainer has now been working as foreman for about five years organising the shifts and work processes for about 40 workers.

The narrative is focused on securing an income and own career progression: Rainer is happy where he is, but also sees himself moving further up the career ladder in the next years within the company he works for. He also says that work intensification, time pressure and shift work are aspects that make him feel being burned out sometimes. Having secure employment and a regular income to maintain the family are and have been key drivers for Rainer's career orientations.

4.3.2.1. Work biography

Rainer finished secondary school and a one-year preparatory vocational school (*Berufsgrundbildungsjahr*) specialising in carpentry which, later on, was accredited towards his apprenticeship as carpenter so that he could finish after two instead of three years. Before starting his apprenticeship Rainer went to the military service (one year). Carpentry was his second choice; initially he wanted to learn an office job, but got the apprenticeship for the carpenter training which of all crafts trades had been his favourite.

Towards the end of his apprenticeship Rainer started to apply for different jobs as it was clear that his employer would not take him on after completion. This combined with carpenters being confronted with few employment possibilities due to lack of demand during that time. Being very concerned about securing an income Rainer quickly started to explore other directions and possibilities, having the automobile industry in mind with its relatively high earnings and good employment prospects. In the end, Rainer secured a job just timely to realise a smooth transition from his apprenticeship into working with a major automobile company. He worked there for 12 months before he applied at his current employer, again because he had a temporary position and his contract was not being renewed. It was his former supervisor who encouraged him to apply with one of their suppliers and again Rainer was lucky to get this job just to ensure a timely transition without becoming unemployed or having to rely on public benefits ('I finished with my old employer in Friday and started with my new employer on Monday').

While this job transition involved changing employers, Rainer continued to do exactly the same tasks, i.e. upholstering car seats on a piecework basis. Since Rainer had a strong orientation towards generating an income the piecework was interesting for him, because as a hard-working, responsible employee he could make good money. However, he also recognised that this was very hard and exhausting work and after six years he started to apply to other jobs within the company, mainly in the areas of foremen, quality control, trainer or other jobs that would not be based on piecework. While he was not successful, it was ultimately one of his supervisors who asked him directly whether he would like to take on the responsibility as foreman and after Rainer had completed a six month probation period he was sent to work at the Portuguese branch of the firm to provide support. Since then (now five years) he has been working as foreman now organising and planning the work he had been doing before. He is also responsible for coordinating about 40 staff and to make sure that an order is being ready in a given period of time, usually one or two days. Thus, he works under high time pressure and also has a lot of responsibility. Rainer stated that he often takes work home – referring to thinking about his work and how to organise processes and improve things when he is at home. However, he likes challenging work and solving problems, also or particularly under pressure, resolving unforeseen incidents and despite problems keeping the production going. This is the exciting part of his work.

Altogether, Rainer has now been working with his current employer for 12 years, starting as upholsterer and having gradually been moving into the position of foreman. Since he started working there he has been working shifts, which, however, Rainer finds relatively unproblematic or, as he says, he has gotten used to it and his family, too.

In his current job his carpentry skills are no longer or only very rudimentary in demand. However, Rainer underlines that he uses a lot of his initial skills at home, to build things or when renovating the house. On the other hand, Rainer today finds himself in a position which requires a lot of coordination, social and administrative skills and probably comes close to the office-type of job he initially was striving for when he finished school.

4.3.2.2. *Transitions*

Most decisive transition

For Rainer, changing to his current employer has been the most important transition, probably because it provided some longer term career prospects and provided for Rainer's professional development. As he says: 'With this job I can sustain my family and I feel all right.' However, overall Rainer considers all his transitions having been smooth, in his view being assessed against never having

been unemployed despite having been confronted with losing his job several times.

Asked about how Rainer manages transitions he states that he seeks to skip them, to get away with it as soon as possible by becoming active and organising that his routine life can go on as usual as soon as possible. He hates when things are not moving forward (this is a good connection to the assembly line he works with) and can also not understand how people, who become unemployed, can become so demotivated that they remain still. He hates when things stand still. And he needs to work because he wants to be able to afford something, also for his family. There is this clear connection between working and securing an income, above all to be financially independent, for a lot of reasons but also to be able to spend money in the end.

Future expected transitions

Rainer thinks that he is in a good position that he could, in the coming years, acquire a higher level position in the company simply due to the demographic shifts and the fact that a considerable number of his older colleagues will soon reach the retirement age. As foreman Rainer is well positioned to move up further the career ladder and this is also what he is hoping and striving for. In a way he says that he wanted to become a foreman and this is where he now is and what he is happy with. But if other career development opportunities come up he would be eager to take advantage of it. For this, he thinks, Rainer depends on supportive colleagues and supervisors, moreover because he is not a 'trained' foreman, e.g. with a *Meister* qualification, but because he has accrued his skill through work experience. From his experience advancing in a job and making a career very much depends on mentors and supervisors who will promote him. Most positions at his company are recruited internally just by people being assigned by supervisors to try out more challenging work.

Also, when finding and getting the apprenticeship, it was in the end his stepfather who went to the employer and organised the contract for him. This pattern of seniors supporting him is also strictly male dominated.

4.3.2.3. *Emerging themes*

Securing an income

Rainer left home at the age of 16 and was expected by his parents to secure his own income as of 18 years of age. In fact, he already left home at the age of 14, because he spent the last two school years at a residential school. This early independence from his parents resulted in pressures of generating a regular income and an own salary and explains Rainer's work orientation being predominantly geared towards stable employment and regular salary schemes.

Throughout the interview he underlined that his career and job changes were in the first place targeted at securing an income, with the concrete job and own professional interests being secondary and subordinated. This combined with the rhetoric around and pride of being financially independent (e.g. Rainer emphasised several times that he never had to rely on some kind of unemployment or other benefits or forms of public financial support). Apparently, this financial independency from support or family structures is very important for him and a key driver in his work biography.

Work intensification and being the buffer

Rainer says that rationalisation, work intensification and all sorts of pressures have increased considerably over the last years. Notably, he may also be more aware of rationalisation processes in his position as foremen than he might have been as regular staff in the assembly line. In his current position Rainer acts as the buffer, having to bear the complaints and pressures from his team and the work pressures put on staff by the management. He finds himself in between, often mediating and negotiating. This he finds very difficult and associates it with being burned out some time. For him it is the most stressful aspect of his work. He also thinks that the time pressure and intensification is inherent of the nature of the jobs since the company's production remains to be based on piecework.

4.3.2.4. Learning

How did Rainer acquire the skills he needs today in his job?

Rainer says that spending time at a boarding school shaped a lot his independence, but also how he interacts with others, because at the boarding school there were students from all kinds of different backgrounds with whom he spent a lot of time. It fostered becoming a team player as did his year with the Federal Armed Forces. He states that for him these were very good experiences.

Rationalisation of learning opportunities and further training

Work intensification and rationalisation have also resulted in learning budgets having been cut down dramatically in the last years. Rainer says that actually there are no offers from the company in terms of further training and that this contrasts to his first years when there were abundant training opportunities (e.g. English language courses, computer courses, human resources management, rhetoric, etc.). In his current position Rainer would particularly like to have training support in terms of computer skills and English language.

The only thing Rainer takes advantage of every year is one week of paid educational leave (most employees in Germany are entitled to). This, however, is mostly not job related, but in this week Rainer does things he likes and is interested in.

Rainer has followed a common male path where he has completed an apprenticeship in one field and then sought semi-skilled work in a large company. He made progress within the company, reaching the position of supervisor. However, the lack of a formal (*Meister*) qualification may make it difficult to work elsewhere at a similar level. On the other hand, Rainer believes his relational skills are highly developed and he works well in teams, including in a leadership role.

4.3.3. Frank, 30s, trained carpenter now working as janitor/maintenance man

4.3.3.1. Bio sketch

Frank trained as a carpenter for construction work (such as roofs – Zimmermann). After completion of the three years apprenticeship he continued with his employer, a medium size crafts business, for another 11 years interrupted only by the military service. Ten years ago, he underwent a career transition when looking for new employment, in the first place to find work that would imply higher job security and a more regular income as his job was partly seasonal. In addition, due to rationalisation people in the company were gradually being deployed. Frank's job change had not really been under pressure and it was quite easy for him to find a new position with a large housing company as janitor. He is still with this housing company being responsible for the maintenance of 97 apartments and houses. His job involves maintaining the surroundings of the objects including gardening, painting, repair works (outdoors and in the houses), arranging the garbage, snow clearing and winter services, etc., but also dealing with the clients and tenants. Over the last years administrative tasks have increased considerably, today making up over 50% of his working time.

The career narrative revolves around this shift of the nature of his work (from handcraft to administration) combined with his search for stable employment and a high level of job security. In the meantime, Frank's former employer recovered and, looking back, Frank could still be working there as a carpenter. However, Frank values job security over other aspects of his work and career. He sees himself with his current employer and job until retirement if nothing unforeseen happens.

4.3.3.2. Contextualisation

Frank lives in a small town in the south of Germany. His workplace is nine kilometres from his house. The interview was conducted by telephone and a bit difficult as Frank was neither very reflective nor communicative, but was open to the interview. The interview lasted 45 minutes.

4.3.3.3. *Work biography*

Frank completed his apprenticeship training as carpenter with a medium size crafts business and continued working with this employer for the following years mainly in construction. Already during the 1990s the construction sector underwent a process of rationalisation so that work became increasingly irregular and seasonal. Ultimately, there was not enough work for all the workers who were gradually being deployed or assigned to other tasks (such as brick-laying). At some point in time workers' salaries were cut by 10% and job security was low; staff was over the years reduced by half. While Frank liked his job and the handcraft and hands on work and also his colleagues and the working atmosphere, own financial commitments (he had built a house with his family) made him look for another job that would give him, in the first place, employment security and a stable income.

Ten years ago he started looking for another job and quite easily found new employment as janitor/maintenance man. In this position Frank is now responsible for 97 apartments and houses, which pertain to a large housing cooperation. He has to maintain the surroundings of the objects and his work includes a great variety of tasks such as gardening, painting, repair work, garbage, winter services, etc. All houses and apartments are in one area very close to each other.

Frank has office hours for the tenants and their complaints. Dealing with the tenants, which involves communication and mediating skills, is not really what Frank likes in his job.

For four (single) weeks per year Frank needs to be on call for 24 hours.

Overall, Frank experiences a high level of work satisfaction as in his job he feels needed and that he is doing something useful.

4.3.3.4. *Learning*

While Frank started working as a carpenter, being in construction has always meant to assume a whole range of other tasks such as brick-laying, particularly when there was not enough work for all the staff in the company. This means that Frank evolved into an 'all-rounder' already early in his career and also when he was working in construction. There he would do brick laying, plastering and other jobs, basically by working side by side with a more experienced colleague. However, particularly during the final years he also often worked on his own. These all-rounder skills were a good basis when Frank applied for the job as janitor. He also learned to have an open and positive approach towards assuming new tasks and trying out different things (e.g. now he is also involved in gardening and electrician work, for example).

During the first six months of his new job Frank was basically moving around with specialised colleagues to get an insight into the different areas and tasks.

New areas he had to develop an understanding for included heating systems and electricity. This knowledge he acquired through colleagues specialised in the field. Frank also needs to control that legal regulations are observed by the tenants.

Further training does not play a significant role as most learning has been learning by doing. Some training has taken place on energy saving measures and how to convey this information to the tenants, first aid, antidiscrimination policies and new EU legislation on particular aspects.

Frank recognises that he would need more knowledge in the area of legal aspects of tenancy law and how to hand over the apartments to new tenants. Here he has scope to ask the employer for specific training courses

Frank has certain degree of autonomy in the performance of tasks, which he likes. He can also control his working time and work time flexibility. Also, that the employer is a good employer in terms of working conditions, social aspects of work, benefits, etc., is more important to Frank than the actual tasks he needs to perform. The employer is a factor that keeps him in place.

Trends: work intensification and more tasks over time, higher levels of work complexity, administrative tasks are increasing over hands on work. The result is that the property is less well maintained than a few years ago.

Frank mainly works on his own but can revert to a wide network of experts that he can contact when he encounters any problems or needs more information on particular issues.

Quotes:

- 'for me it is not so important what I do, but that I keep my employment and have something to do';
- 'I don't really apply any of my initial skills as a carpenter anymore, which in a way is a pity, but, well, this is how it developed';
- 'I would prefer that they employ somebody for the administration, because I prefer to work with my hands'.

Frank started with a clear formally recognised *Beruf* as a carpenter but his work, status and identity evolved into filling more flexible roles in the labour market, which required a greater variety of all-round skills. His willingness to take on new challenges seems to drive his learning and helps him make successful career transitions. His practical skills are highly developed, his relational and emotional skills less so.

4.3.4. Christian, 30s, social worker

4.3.4.1. Bio sketch

Christian is married and has two small children. After completion of the *Fachabitur* Michael did his civil service in an elderly care institution and another

internship to obtain access to Higher Education (*Fachhochschulzugang*). However, Christian then had to wait for another 1.5 years before being admitted to study social work. During this period he had different temporary jobs (gardener at a graveyard, courier driver) and also went through periods of unemployment. After finishing his studies with a one year practical assistance in a school Christian started working with his current employer (public administration, municipality) as social pedagogue providing vocational guidance for young people. He has been with this employer for 10 years.

His narrative revolves around drifting through a period of uncertainty of about three years during which he did not know what to do professionally and when he tried out different, mainly low skilled jobs and also experienced periods of unemployment. The decision to become a social worker was finally strongly influenced by his parents, who are also both social workers as is his wife. Important for him in his current job are employment security, social recognition and job satisfaction. Being a temporary employee initially Christian had to struggle and be patient to become permanent.

Individual background information in relation to sample category:

- current occupation: Social worker/social pedagogue providing vocational guidance and advice for young people aged 15 to 27 (public employer);
- with same first employer since 2003;
- younger mid-career;
- personal characteristics/specificities: parents and partner have been very influential on career decisions: both his parents and his wife are also social workers;
- geographical region/geographical mobility: Little geographical mobility across different smaller and bigger cities within the Ruhr.

4.3.4.2. *Work biography*

Completion of a specialised vocational diploma; then civil service in elderly care institution. After the civil service Christian did a six-month practical to count towards full accreditation of his *Fachhochschulzugang*, working with children in a project that provided mobile services. Before getting admission to study social work Christian then had to wait for another 1.5 years. During this period he had different temporary jobs (gardener at a graveyard, courier driver) and also went through periods of unemployment.

Then Christian started studying social work for the following 3.5 years followed by a practical year working as social worker in a school. He got his study place by chance (admission by lottery) otherwise he would have had to wait for another two years. After completion of his studies, he started working with his current employer (public administration, municipality) as a social pedagogue in the area of providing vocational guidance for young people aged 15 to 27. By

German law each municipality has to provide such services. These involve providing information to facilitate school-to-work transition, but also more personal advice and coaching as well as cooperation with schools, job centres and employment agencies. However, much guidance is also related to family issues (e.g. leaving home or not), financial support, drug abuse, etc. Young people are directed to the respective more specialised services if needed.

4.3.4.3. *Transitions*

In the beginning of his career Christian was not really sure which direction to take. Today he is happy with his job position, daily work and overall work situation. He does not feel under- or over-challenged in his work and is still highly motivated in his job as social vocational advisor/referral person for young people. To preventing employees from 'caring too much' the employer provides regular supervision and support.

Christian went through an indecisive orientation at the first transition (from school to studying) with an overall of about 2.5 years where he completed the civil service and underwent periods of unemployment as well as doing several temporary (partly low skilled) jobs. Studying social work has been influenced by his parents, but for Christian retrospectively it has turned out to have been the right track.

What is important for him in his current job are employment security, social recognition and job satisfaction. While his calm and relaxed personality had been disadvantageous at school (signalling low interest and not being motivated), it has turned into a positive asset in his work as social pedagogue.

First transition

Initially, Christian wanted to do something in the area of economics. However, after having experienced difficulties at school and having failed the *Abitur*, he decided to do a specialised *Fachabitur* and do the civil service rather than giving general university entry qualification another try. This also gave him time for reflection upon his future career. During this period of 2.5 years between completing school and starting his studies his parents, who are both social workers, advised him to also follow this route as it seemed to fit his personality and interests. Retrospectively, Christian thinks that going into social work has been the right decision and he is happy to have followed his parents' advice. He feels comfortable and confident working in personal social services.

Second transition

Christian thinks that his most meaningful transition has been from his practical year to enter employment, i.e. moving from the status of a learner to fully recognised employee with acknowledged professional status. The main reason

being that at the professional level the work is more encompassing and involves a lot of conceptual work. While at a lower professional status he always felt accepted, work at the fully acknowledged professional status is more challenging, comprehensive and interesting. This transition process (from after completion of studying social work to enter regular employment) has also been very difficult. Initially, Christian wanted to continue working in schools as social pedagogical advisor and wrote numerous applications, but was not successful. Working with the municipality in the area of vocational youth welfare services was a coincidence: he did not even write an application, but initially got a temporary position (maternity cover) through one of his mother's friends.

Third transition

After initially having been on temporary contracts for five years, Christian is now in a full-time permanent position (with same employer). For him this has been a very important transition although his contents and responsibility level of his work have not changed.

Patterns of adjustment/learning from transitions

Christian has the impression that he did not have a master plan for his individual career, but many incidents and transitions happened by coincidence (e.g. admission for his study place chosen by random/by lottery and he was lucky). The pattern Christian sees would be that he has always been quite relaxed about things just happening by chance and because he tried to make the best out of it, but also being proactive in trying things. At least looking back his work biography makes sense to him, because he feels satisfied with his job and ultimately also about how his individual career has developed thus far. He is trusting that things also will develop well in the future, even if restructuring processes would make his job obsolete or he would lose his job. He is positive that in one way or another, his working life will go on. Christian is also not worried that he might need to manage new tasks and transitions. On the other hand, he believes that his current job will always be needed, but might be provided by other service providers.

The role of career guidance support

When Christian was indecisive about which career path to choose he did not consider or did not know of any kind of career guidance support, like the one he himself is currently providing. The student guidance at the university would just inform about the available study programmes, while the career service at the unemployment agency (where he went) was, in his view, really bad and not professional. The lady there advised him to train as childcare worker, which he found was underchallenging given that he wanted to study. However, instead of

waiting for a study place and do some temporary low skilled jobs for over two years he might as well have trained as a nursery teacher and would then had entered university at the same point in time. But nobody directed him to follow this path initially.

4.3.4.4. *Emerging themes*

Status and recognition

The status of the employer is important: Working for the municipality has an important signalling effect indicating responsibility, security, stable employment, good working conditions – for all kinds of employees irrespective of their position. This gives a different outward representation than when somebody works for a private service provider. This is important for Christian, that he feels his professional position is more highly valued and recognised and overall more important, for example that his employer sometimes is in the newspapers or so. Family and friends more strongly notice that his work is important. Also at the political and administrative level Christian works within a network of cooperating public institutions, which are all influential and respected. He feels that through this networking the information exchange is much better than for other colleagues who work with private service providers. Also in the region the municipal administration and services have a good reputation.

Conflicts

In his area of work, many social service providers have a religious background or are directly church run and there have been situation where Christian would have liked to apply for a job but would have refrained from doing so because he is not religious.

4.3.4.5. *Learning*

Work demands

Different areas of work that require different skills:

- as an advisor at the level of client interaction, communication skills and understanding are required, but also to signal that problems can be solved, to be patient and calm while others are stressed and panic easily;
- he also needs knowledge about structures and administrative processes. Organising his work and working in a structured way are perceived as own personal strength;
- both types of skills fit his personality and are two dimensions of his work that Christian really likes;
- two other team members work in a complementary way: one female colleague is able to effectively interact with the clients, applying more

psychological skills; the other male colleague is more extroverted and thus establishes a different relationship with the clients. This skill mix makes them being a good working team that is able to deal with very different kinds of clients.

Training

- Christian participates about once every year in a several days training to acquire specialised work-related expertise. The training is employer supported;
- failed the opportunity to do a longer work-related further training to qualify as educational advisor (competitive situation with other colleagues), but did a (fairly boring) 10-week training in advanced administration;
- while there exist other qualifying training programmes (e.g. to qualify as counselling supervisor) those would require more intensive studying and examinations Christian is not up to. Furthermore, he is satisfied with his work and actually does not need such advanced kinds of training to be effective in his daily work. He feels comfortable where he is and has currently no ambitions to move into any other direction. Christian thinks that a main driver for further training or specialisation would be to be dissatisfied with the job (like is the case with one female friend), but with him this is currently not the case;
- informal learning from other colleagues also is very important.

4.3.5. Ali, 40s, factory worker and representative at the local parliament

Ali is an iconic case and details of his career are given in the main report.

4.3.6. Peter, 40s, IT systems administrator/IT technician

4.3.6.1. Bio sketch

Peter is an IT systems administrator. Currently he works 75% as employee in the public sector and 25% as freelancer. During the 1990s, after having completed the *Abitur* and the civil service as emergency medical assistant, Peter studied several subjects ranging from political and social sciences to public law and informatics. However, he never completed any of these courses, but decided to work as a freelance IT consultant in 2000. When studying, but also already starting at the age of 12, he trained himself (auto-didactically) in the different fields of IT such as programming, network administration, data processing, etc., up to a point where he could consider himself expert enough to find customers. When the family moved from southern to northern Germany in 2002 he gave up his consultancy work and started working part-time as IT technician in the public sector. Considerations for this shift were family commitments – to have time for

his children and a higher level of job security. While his current freelance work makes up half of his salary and would now be easy to extent, Peter wants to stick to his current employment arrangement for the coming years despite some dissatisfying aspects. One is accepting a considerably lower income because he has no formal degree in informatics.

His career narrative revolves around taking chances and balancing work and family interests that lead to accommodating compromises at different stages of his life.

4.3.6.2. *Contextualisation*

The interview with Peter was conducted face-to-face and lasted one hour. Peter was open, reflective and communicative.

4.3.6.3. *Work biography*

After completion of secondary education with the *Abitur* Peter did the civil service as ambulance man, continued working in this job afterwards for a little while and then he started to study political science, sociology, history, public law and computer science. Later, Peter started to work as freelance IT specialist taking advantage of the IT hype. He decided not to complete his studies, but to give it up in favour of earning money and securing the family income. Already before, in the previous five years, he had started to have side jobs in the IT field and could gain some first work experience which in the end were the basis for him to start his own business five years later. All his IT knowledge Peter acquired through self-study and practical work experience. He learnt auto-didactically and trained himself to become an IT expert. His first employer when Peter was still a student also became his first main client later on for whom Peter did different programming jobs, some of which he subsequently could sell to other clients.

When Peter decided to quit studying and work as freelance IT technician he started working part-time since at that time he already had two small children.

4.3.6.4. *Transitions*

The first transition Peter describes has been initiated by moving to another city in 2002, which implied that he could no longer continue his freelance work as most of his clients were locally based. He thus applied for a regular job, which he initially did full-time for six months, than part-time 50% (when he wanted to reduce because of his children) and which later was again increased to 75%. This today remains the permanent employment arrangement. Interestingly, Peter got this regular job despite not having been formally qualified in the field. Two factors helped him to get the job, first that he had very good references from his former clients and, second, that there was still significant staff shortage in the IT sector at that time and that career changers without a formal qualification were

quite common. This, however, changed a few years later when the sector became highly competitive: 'when I applied in 2002 there were probably less than 10 applicants whereas two years later in 2004 we had a similar job vacancy and more than 200 candidates applied'.

Major transitions

One major transition for Peter has been to decide not to complete his studies and become self-employed, with this decision abandoning the idea of finishing what he had been doing for eight years. The second major transition was the move from being self-employed into dependent employment. This involved considerable changes in terms of independency, time flexibility and being autonomous in decision-making and how to approach work tasks. Peter says that this, in turn, influences his level of job satisfaction and that as independent employee his job satisfaction is much lower. This partly derives from getting direct feed-back from clients when being self-employed in contrast to doing a more regular job in his current workplace: 'my boss normally does not say 'thank you' when I do things'. On the other hand, Peter also sees the many advantages the dependent employment has for him and that overall he can be much more relaxed in his work because he has less pressure.

'Well, I think for me this model is perfect. Particularly against the rest of my biography, how I live at the moment and how I want to live, this is really the best solution, to have this combination. [...] If I could have planned it, then that would have been my plan. In the end this all developed by chance. In particular, having the job as employee as a second pillar has so many advantages. When I now see how others have to work, those who are self-employed. I can be really laid back and I can say 'well, I am just not doing anything for the next two months, I don't need a project or another job, my income is enough'.'

So, Peter takes the best from both employment arrangements, combining stability and a regular income from his dependent employment and permanent position and a high level of job satisfaction and independency in the performance of tasks from his freelance work. He also recognised that from his freelance work he has more challenging tasks and new inputs also in terms of learning.

Overall, Peter does not consider his transitions as having been disruptive. Rather he has been taken advantage of new opportunities that came up and that today fit well into a more or less coherent work biography where most of the things he has been doing in his life have been or are being useful. Peter says: 'Well, yes, sometimes I am not sure whether the different stages just fit or whether I make them fit. But indeed it always feels as if they just fit. And so far the transitions have been fairly smooth. For me the particular situation actually used to come up as an opportunity that then actually fitted to the rest and overall picture. On the other hand, I am also relatively open to new solutions that come

up. I don't have to take a particular career path. In fact, I don't have to make any career, I am not particularly career oriented. I just want to make an income, much more is not really necessary. And this I think makes me being open for new things that come up. And if something comes up that works well, well, then it fits. And insofar I never really experienced these transitions as disruptive but rather as chances.

Future expectations and transitions

Peter really likes his job and the technological knowledge involved. However, more recently he has become concerned whether he would still like his job in 10 years time – and what could be the alternative if he does not like his job anymore the way he does today. The main issue here are the pace of learning and new learning requirements. Fast learning and self-study are the basis for Peter's job and success and he thinks that maybe at the age of 50 or so his learning capacities may decrease. He has a colleague who is 15 years older and who is just tired of the constant learning and learning pressure. There are two aspects, one is the interest in learning and the other aspect is learning capabilities. Peter says that this is a new thinking for him and brings up relatively new concerns. This thinking may restructure his employment arrangement in terms of combining dependent employment and freelance work. But at the moment Peter thinks that he will still continue for a while with the current arrangement. However, due to the relatively little pay Peter is also considering to change to a private employer when his children have moved out of the house and are a bit older, maybe in three years time. In three years Peter may explore new job chances in the private sector.

4.3.6.5. Emerging themes

Peter's narrative revolves around balancing different interests and making compromises to accommodate family demands and balancing work and the family:

- Peter quit his studies to work fully independently as IT freelancer when his children were small and the family was depending on his income. The key driver here was securing a regular income. As a result, he never completed a university degree which now turns out to be disadvantageous when working for the public sector (while having a degree or not is completely irrelevant for his freelance work and, as he assumes, would probably also be secondary when working for the private sector. However, in the public sector it means a considerable lower pay);
- after having moved to northern Germany he exclusively looked for jobs that were part-time. With this decision he was confined to working for the public sector. This was because he wanted to have more time for his children. At

- that time (in 2002) it was easy for him to find suitable employment that would meet these requirements because of great staff shortages in the IT sector;
- working for the private sector or as freelancer would both get him a higher income (his 25% freelance work generates about half of his income), but the first would imply long working hours, while the second option would imply greater job insecurity. Thus, Peter regards the combination of freelance and dependent employment as ideal as this gives him the flexibility to combine family and work demands;
 - at some point he considered getting an informatics degree (e.g. through a distant learning course) as he encounters some knowledge gaps when it comes to serious programming – and because of not being able to advance beyond the status of ‘technician’ with his current employer. Also, increasing his freelance work would give him greater work satisfaction. However, getting a degree would imply freeing up time for additional learning; with more freelance work he would lose his current job security. As family comes first, both considerations are not really an option at the moment (but maybe in three to four years when the children are grown up).

Pay and qualification

Not being paid according to his skills and knowledge but to his level of vocational qualification is still bothering Peter. If he had finished his degree with a formal academic qualification he would now earn much more than what he does as technician. This is one aspect that makes Peter regret that he did not complete his studies. However, from his work biography and how his individual career has developed he is satisfied. When he quit his studies to work as freelancer he never thought he would ever work as dependent employee and as a freelancer his formal qualification is completely irrelevant.

4.3.6.6. *Learning*

Peter has become an IT expert learning purely auto-didactically. Answering to how he acquired his skills he says: ‘Auto-didactically, completely. I started at the age of 12, a little bit systematically at school choosing mathematics and physics as major subjects, taking some informatics courses at school. Through this I had a little bit more systematic instruction at school, but for a fairly short period of time. But in parallel I just got a lot of practical work experience. Since 1995 I started working in the IT field with side jobs when I was a student.’

Until today Peter has not followed any former training course related to computer knowledge and IT. When he takes paid educational leave he takes other courses that interest him, e.g. languages or sign language. The courses that he might actually need to go to advance in his field are too expensive and are not being paid for by his employer (a useful course may be costing EUR

1 000). On the other hand, the knowledge in the IT field is so rapidly outdated that constant self-learning is a requirement anyway. Thereby, much learning takes place through interaction with colleagues. For example, Peter is working in a lot of open source projects where the exchange practically is built into the project tasks. For his learning he also relies on the professional networks he is involved in. These are particularly helpful for his freelance work.

Overall, Peter describes himself as a generalist, meaning that he is not so specialised but is able to assume a broad range of tasks. For example, he does programming, web-design and web-programming, data management, etc. He also works together with a lot with graphic designers and programmes their graphic design by translating it into codes. Here Peter benefits from some topographical knowledge he acquired when working for a publisher and doing the layout of flyers as a student. This is what he mainly does in his freelance work. Then in both jobs he also does a lot of systems and network administration applying complex configuration codes. This requires a lot of specialist knowledge. In his employee work he is responsible for server administration and installing computer software. However, he is also responsible for some servers in his freelance work. As freelancer Peter mostly works for SME and needs well developed communication skills to understanding what his clients need and want.

Most of the business administration, accountancy and legal knowledge Peter needs to run his own business he acquired during his studies at the university. From this point of view he still considers his studies to have been very useful despite the fact that he never completed a degree. In particular his legal knowledge, and that he knows how to read and interpret legal texts, have become increasingly important to run a business in the IT field.

Where Peter encounters skills deficits are in the area of programming and in this field he notices that he is lacking some basic skills and a formal qualification. As a result, Peter at some point considers studying informatics through a distant learning course, but abandoned this idea temporarily because at the moment he has no time for such a course, mostly also due to his family commitments. He may consider doing this formal course at a later stage, maybe in a few years time.

Learning forms an integral part of Peter's job. Much learning is through his work or by reading, but some learning also forms part of his work and is also paid for. Then other parts are self-directed learning in his private time. However, some of this learning Peter regards as leisure and some parts are also entertaining and related to relaxing. Overall, Peter considers learning to take about three hours per week.

Peter follows a more or less classic IT development pathway where self-directed learning and learning from experience play a more important role than formal qualifications. Time spent in higher education, however, contributed to the

development of other skills, even though Peter did not complete his studies. IT, however, is an unusual field of work in Germany where qualifications and completion of prescribed formal learning pathways are not integral for almost all prospective entrants aiming to become members of a regulated occupation: *Beruf*.

4.3.7. Roland, 40s, electrician

Roland has been working as self-employed electrician for about nine years. Last year he arranged with a colleague to combine his self-employment with a regular part-time position as electrician working as employee 20 hours per week. Roland trained as electrician after completion of the *Realschulabschluss*, then worked for three years with an oil refinery interrupted by the civil service in a social institution. This experience made Roland complete the *Abitur* with a specialisation in social work (*Fachhochschulreife Sozialwesen*) and then travel for five months through New Zealand. When getting back he worked for a small electricians craft company and then did his *Meister* qualification. In parallel Roland started to work as assembly fitter for wind energy sites (Germany wide) and gradually started his own business. However, during this time he also was periodically unemployed. Roland then started to study at the university but only for one semester, then continued in his former job.

Roland's career narrative revolves around trying out different things as working as an electrician has never been his dream job. In parallel he is in this profession exploring different fields and new directions which, overall, implied a considerable number of job changes and transitions. Today, Roland successfully runs his own business in this professional field and also sees himself there in the future. However, he has been seeking to do other things or combine his job with other personal interests (e.g. in the field of sustainable and wind energy). Ultimately, he wanted to become a farmer, but this direction never materialised. For the future Roland would like to explore other opportunities in his professional field including working in a different country.

4.3.7.1. Contextualisation

The interview with Roland was conducted at his home and lasted for over an hour. He was very open and communicative. His family situation was not mentioned to influence or have influenced his individual career despite the large number of transitions and changes he has had.

4.3.7.2. Work biography

Roland is an electrician with a *Meister* qualification. He combines a regular part-time position (20 hours per week) with running his own small business as self-employed electrician of equally 20 hours per week, but which also often involves

working longer hours. However, since this falls into being his own business he does not mind or he just switches of the phone over the week-end. Most of his clients come from networks and private contacts; he is not really marketing his services.

Roland grew up on a big farm and initially wanted to become a farmer. His father, however, was an electrician and was always in charge of installing the electrical equipment and facilities at the farm and in the barns. He used to take Roland with him when he was a child so he got familiar with the job at an early stage and followed his parent's advice to train as an electrician instead of becoming a farmer. After completing the *Realschule* Roland did a preparatory year at a vocational school before starting the apprenticeship at a small crafts business. As the company could not take him on after completion of the training Roland applied with larger industry companies and upon completion of his training got a job with a labour leasing company which appointed him to work for a large company at an oil refinery. This for him was quite exciting and a positive work and learning experience, being, as a job starter, accepted into a team for undertaking fairly challenging tasks. After a few months Roland interrupted his work at the oil refinery to do the civil service in a social institution for disabled people. This experience was very important for Roland who, for the first time, got into contact with the social field and social work as before he only knew crafts workers. Afterwards he continued with the oil refinery for another two years. However, the work experience in the social field made Roland go back to school and complete the *Abitur* with a specialisation in social work (*Fachhochschulreife Sozialwesen*). His intention then was also to maybe study, but before he decided to travel for five months through New Zealand where he worked on several farms. When he returned, he had given up the idea of studying social work and went back to work in his former job.

In 1994, through contacts, Roland started a new job with a small electricians craft business where he worked for one year. To become more independent, the following year Roland pursued the *Meister* qualification at a full-time *Meister* school. Afterwards Roland started to work as assembly fitter for wind energy sites (German wide) and gradually started his own business as a parallel employment possibility. This business was growing and as assembler Roland was quite busy and mobile across the north of Germany for about two years. During this time he also went through periods of several months of unemployment.

Roland then started to study an international leisure course at the *Fachhochschule*, but also continued to work in his former job alongside studying, basically to earn some money. Within only one semester he decided to continue in his former job again full-time and quit studying. Some learning results were that Roland realised that he is more a hands-on person than somebody who wants to sit at a desk and acquire theoretical knowledge. Studying was also

linked to the idea of opening up another professional route into the leisure industry since some of his friends had started a canoe business. Going into this direction may have been a result of Roland until today thinking that electrician was never really his dream job, but that actually he wanted to do something else. However, that his electrician skills are valued, he is good in this job and finally makes a living with it in the end always led him to abandon possible alternative professional routes he started or thought of starting. This is one of the dominant career narratives in Roland's biography: always getting back to this professional route, but trying out different things against the idea that actually he would like to do something different.

Roland then started his own business, which he has maintained until today working self-employed mostly on particular projects.

4.3.7.3. *Transitions and Learning*

Overall, Roland considers that he has mostly had smooth transitions, often being lucky by getting to know about job vacancies through friends and his fairly extensive networks. This combined or combines with Roland's advanced skills and his work attitude of being creative in exploring and trying out new things and opportunities. By following this approach Roland takes opportunities, but also follows his interests, for example by working in wind energy or with the oil refinery. By trying out different areas and new challenging work Roland can broaden and deepen his skills, at the same time building up professional networks that he now can benefit from while running his own business and getting projects and jobs. Roland also has a strong interest in people, situations, professional areas and social environments. For example, his current 20 hours regular job is at the prison/young offenders' institution where Roland is responsible for the electrical equipment, supplies, electrical lines, etc. So, in his work in varying professional and social areas Roland gets into contact with a lot of different people and situations, which he likes exploring and interacting with. He says that being open and communicative are the prerequisites to learn new things, develop one's own skills further and also to learn about new jobs and challenges.

Roland recognised that his many job changes and transitions may derive from his curiosity to learn and discover new things and the feeling of getting bored when having done something for a while. He has always been and still is quite confident that he will find something else to do. He is optimistic that he will always find something new and interesting to do as an electrician based on his broad experience and skills. He is also open to follow trainings and further professional development courses if required to do something that interests him. Although with some negative experiences of transitions Roland never thought that he would actually fall through the cracks or become long term unemployed.

Even in disappointing situations Roland kept his optimism and positive thinking in terms of future job perspectives.

Future transitions

Roland plans to leave his job at the young offenders' institution and not to do this any longer than for another year. While he likes the job Roland says that the work he does is not remunerated accordingly and that he partly feels exploited. Other things he would like to do are related to working in the wind crafts area or to work abroad for some time. However, this needs to be negotiated and planned together with his family. Roland thinks that he is well equipped and skilled to master future job changes and challenges, even though being an electrician has never been his dream job. He kind of grew into this profession and is today glad that he has accrued all the experience he has. He says: 'Well, I have this really solid professional background, I have the *Meister* qualification and as I said, well, although I don't really quite know how I came about to do this *Meister* I am really glad today that I have done it. Moreover, since this has never been my dream job, to do this electricians stuff, you know? It is just that at that time I did not know anything else to do. I also did not know any other job. I only knew this trade, and electrician was what Daddy was doing and, well, then you just do the same thing. Although, it wasn't what I really wanted to be doing.'

4.3.7.4. Learning

Required skills

Roland's work involves a broad variety of skills. For example, he has to budget and calculate new electrical facilities. This involves finding solutions and calculating the costs and benefits, for example of repairing the old equipment against buying a new one. Here Roland is responsible for fairly large supplies and facilities. Thus, in his job Roland has a lot of responsibility and he needs to be reliable and responsible. Roland thinks that for his work he is underpaid, but on the other hand he benefits for training opportunities, for example. At the young offenders institution they offered him to follow different further training courses that are paid by the employer. Recently, Roland went to a course that he needs for his self-employment which was on how to do a cost-benefit analysis of large electrical facilities.

Areas in which Roland is lacking some basic skills and what he does not like doing is everything to do with the financial aspects related to running a business, accountancy, financing, etc.

In Roland's view the best way of learning is a combination of the different methods, e. g. learning through colleagues and informal learning but also following formal learning courses. Particularly in the technical field both informal

and formal learning are important. Also some of the very basic skills he learnt during his preparatory year in the vocational school are partly still relevant in some situations and Roland then is glad that at some point in his work trajectory he has come across it and is familiar with it.

Roland did not have a clear commitment to his initial occupational choice, but once embarked upon a clear occupational pathway with opportunities for progression and development he followed it through to *Meister* status and self-employment.

4.3.8. Paul, 40s, self-employed carpenter

First interview: June 2012

Follow-up interview: January 2013

4.3.8.1. Bio sketch

Paul works as self-employed carpenter. After completion of secondary education (*Abitur*) he spent about seven years with different temporary jobs, including working for 1.5 years at a children's theatre and in a call centre of the regional transportation company. Paul was already 27 when he finally started an apprenticeship as carpenter and stayed on as trained carpenter with the same carpenter's shop for another four years. At some point Paul wanted to deepen his expertise and went, inspired by the carpenter who did works for the theatre, to a special full-time handicraft design school for two years. This further qualification (*ausgebildeter Gestalter im Handwerk*, i.e. certified craft designer) was publicly funded (with the *MeisterBafög*). Doing the *Meister* would have been an alternative, but Paul opted for the school-based qualification route. In any case, the aim was to become self-employed afterwards and start his own workshop. In the end, however, Paul found out that this qualification did not allow him to start his own carpenter's workshop (which to date requires the *Meister* qualification) so that, as an alternative, Paul started a business for assembly (*Montagebetrieb*), which was possible under the given legal framework. This assembly business has gradually transformed into a carpenter's business during the last years. When the first interview was conducted Paul had been working self-employed running his own business for almost six years.

Paul's career narrative focuses on the transition from dependent employment to self-employment and the formal and financial obstacles, lack of guidance and lack of support. It is also structured around the ambivalence of working self-employed in a one man business and the notion that carpentry was not really his first professional choice, but rather a compromise. Coming to terms with self-discipline and self-organisation prevail as dominant themes.

4.3.8.2. *Contextualisation*

Both interviews were telephone interviews, the first one lasting 72 minutes and the second one 40 minutes. Both interviews had long narrative passages. Paul lives in a major city in the centre of Germany.

4.3.8.3. *Work biography*

After completion of *Abitur* Paul wanted to try out different things to get a job orientation and spent, in total, about seven years doing different temporary jobs, including working for 1.5 years for a children's theatre and some time for a travel agency as a tour guide. He also had some smaller short-term jobs. Alongside, he was registered at the university as sports student, but without any serious intentions to actually complete the course. Paul considered different possible career pathways but finally decided to train as a carpenter. He first did an internship and then, finally at the age of 27, started an apprenticeship with a small carpentry workshop with three staff. After completion Paul continued working there for another four years, but then was looking for a new challenge. Interpersonal problems and too much routine work were the key issues that made him seek to change employers or jobs. By coincidence Paul learnt about a special full-time handicraft design school (*Gestalter im Handwerk*) which takes two years. The decision for Paul to advance his career was to either do the *Meister* qualification or to do this specific course. Paul opted for the handicraft design school which he completed after two years at the age of 36. The objective of these two options had been to become self-employed.

Although Paul was guaranteed that with the qualification as *Gestalter im Handwerk* he could become self-employed this, in reality was not the case. Wrong information in the end turned out to have been a major obstacle for Paul to start his own business as ultimately the *Meister* qualification was still required. The formalities of getting permission and support to start his own business also had to do with his status before and during the design course. Apparently, Paul was not adequately informed about the formalities. Eventually, he received unemployment benefits so that any income from a regular business was counted towards his subsistence and benefit rates. So, ultimately Paul could not make a regular income in the beginning, but gradually worked towards having his own independent business, which he has now been running for over six years as a one-man business.

4.3.8.4. *Transitions*

Paul really liked his job at the theatre, the working atmosphere there and the creative environment and also the (carpentry) work was more creative. He was initially offered a long-term job, but this offer could not be upheld due to rationalisation of staff. At that time Paul was very disappointed and disillusioned

as he saw his future professional career at the theatre or in this kind of creative environment. It took him some time to find a new professional direction and all the other temporary jobs he had thereafter were just to earn some money. Deciding to do a carpentry apprenticeship was not an easy decision for him and, although interested in the trade, more of a compromise. This may be a major reason why Paul to date is somehow ambivalent about this decision as there are also many aspects of this job that he does not like. For example, alternatively Paul also considered becoming a gardener as he really likes working outside. Against this ambivalence Paul still considers maybe redirecting his professional life in the future. Also working self-employed in a one-man business is often not satisfying for him, for one part because he is working alone and, for the other part, the responsibility involved and having to do all the administration and financial aspects of the job. He finds this tiring and putting pressure on him. He is very busy with organising the business and also the financial pressure is high as Paul started from zero but had to finance a transporter, tools, machines and all other necessary equipment.

The decision to finally learn a trade can be considered as a major transition. It was for him the decision to become skilled (compared to working as unskilled in the different temporary jobs) and also to face the challenge of starting something that he wanted to complete, to make a change, to do something. Also, to start the apprenticeship at the age of 27 was not easy. It also implied – at that age – to live for three years on fairly little money.

The second major transition was to start his own business as this required a lot of risk taking and self-confidence since he has to manage so many different tasks in his job combined with working solely self-organised.

4.3.8.5. *Learning*

Support for structuring and organising own schedules and work

Paul finds it very difficult to be self-organised and well-structured throughout his job and not getting any support. Not having a structured day or a pre-structured schedule but creating this structure every day all by himself. He once considered getting a coach for it to learn to be more efficient in self-organisation.

‘There are some friends who said that maybe I should get a kind of coach (laughing). Somebody, who, well, who can get you to, that you take decisions, put things into practice, structure your time efficiently. I have seen this now with a friend of mine who is also self-employed, just now it started working really well. She sometimes has a hard time (dry spell) and then at some point she started, surely not to make big money, rather for very little extra income, but working for an association and doing some counselling there and this has really helped her a lot, to have some fixed time slots that help her structure her daily work. And if you

are self-employed you really need this. And this has made me think to maybe have one fixed day per week where I can just go to work, just like before. You go there, you do your work and, fine, you go home. And this I have to organise myself every day, to organise my daily work schedule. When do I write my offers, when do I take the time to ring the contractors. It also takes time during the day, sitting at the desk. Then I get the papers, when do I do the deliveries, when can I be in the workshop, etc. This I have to do all the time, also on week-ends, and I am just stressed out about it, in addition to people asking me all the time 'well, you are a carpenter, can't you help me with this and that?'

Self-organisation and time management partly form part of the training and *Meister* qualification but some in-job training or coaching is either not available or very expensive. The craft skills Paul needs in his daily work are less problematic, this is learning-by-doing but in this aspect Paul also benefits from having undergone fairly good apprenticeship training. During his apprenticeship Paul already made sure and could negotiate to learn certain skills. Here it was an advantage that he was already older and more self-confident than typical apprentices or trainees who start right after school. In his work today much learning the trade is also learning through others – in Paul's case not immediate colleagues, because he is working alone but it might be another carpenter or a contractor who can advise him or help out when he encounters specific problems.

Paul would like to learn more through interaction with others but in his current job has not enough possibilities (like for example compared to when working for the theatre). Formal learning is not really a good approach for Paul.

For the future Paul is still ambivalent. On the one hand he has just started to build up something, to stand on his own feet, to get his business going so that he can live from it. He also likes to work independently and to be his own boss. On the other hand there are many aspects that he does not like about his job. Maybe he would also like to try out something different. However, he is hesitant as this would involve a lot of risk taking. Since he started late with getting a regular income he has not yet accrued any pension benefits or a financial backup for the future. This he is still trying to achieve.

4.3.8.6. *Follow-up interview (January 2013)*

Main development

Paul has sought to develop a more relaxed approach towards his work and to get away from the pressure. He is still ambivalent about working self-employed and has explored other possible directions to become more flexible and less dependent on his business.

(a) Theme 1: taking a break – taking a decision – taking things easy

To take a break from his partly stressful situation of running a one-man business and being constantly responsible for everything, Paul took an occasional job as a hiking tour guide in Corsica and spent there three weeks, combining a holiday with an unforeseen job opportunity offered by a friend. This was after having completed another big job that was very stressful. When he returned his clients had not paid their bills so that in fact Paul was broke and had to write a series of reminders. This brought him back to reality. He then became disillusioned about his job situation and said that he would give himself another six months to finally decide whether to continue with his self-employment or not. He was not very motivated but could secure a few interesting jobs towards the end of the year. It was finally a book that helped him to realise that he has difficulties with self-organisation and not being able to keep deadlines to then work, very effectively, under high pressure.

The book helps him to improve his self-organisation and plan things better through. He is now seeking to develop a new approach toward his work and seeks to work effectively as long as possible, but when he realises that he has no more energy or is distracted he puts his work aside and tries to do other things, maybe reading or relaxing, but not putting more pressure on himself. He has also realised that actually he likes carpentry work, but not all aspects of it and that there are jobs he does not like. As a consequence, he has become more selective in terms of rejecting some jobs that he knows he won't be happy doing. Or that he calculates that he needs more time for finishing a particular job rather than working under time pressure that comes from his clients. Additionally, Paul has started to work together with some bigger carpenter workshops, which can produce standard parts like cupboards on demands within a short period of time and then Paul just does the technical planning and the assembly, but not actually makes the cupboard. Overall Paul thinks he has become more effective because he has started to define his limits and needs and has become more aware of how to respect these when planning his working days and jobs he takes on as new tasks. 'I just seek to become more relaxed, also at work. Becoming more relaxed is a key objective and not having this constant stress and working under pressure and working 15 hours a day. I cannot compensate this with my little income.'

(b) Theme 2: work-life balance

Putting a lot of pressure on himself also put a strain on his relationship. Together with his partner Paul developed a new approach in terms of their communication structure. They now do not talk anymore about work so that neither of them needs to justify anymore their time management at work. This used to be a common pattern since his partner is also working self-

employed. This approach has taken away some pressure from the relationship. The book that was the other decisive input for Paul to look differently at his job was also given to him by his partner.

(c) Theme 3: future developments

In the summer Paul is going to do the job as hiking tour guide again in Corsica, but this time for four weeks. He sees this as a good way to not just make sure that he is having a vacation, but also to make some little money with it and spending time outside. As tour guide he also enjoyed interacting with a group of people in contrast to always working on his own. This experience has inspired him to also work more in the interaction with other carpenters for specific jobs.

Asked about what had happened to his idea to start a double employment strategy, i.e. working one to two days per week in dependent employment and partly self-employed he stated that he completely forgot about this idea and had not pursued this further. However, he has thought about starting to keep bees and produce honey and maybe develop this from a hobby into another small business and making an additional income with it. It would be something he could dedicate some time on in the summer when working in the workshop is not so enjoyable. He thinks this would be something he would like and also sees this as an alternative to spend the summer in the dusty and noisy carpenter workshop. Paul actually likes nature, being outside, learning from nature – and he likes bees.

Also in the second interview Paul's narrative revolves around being ambivalent about working self-employed, managing stress and work pressure but also become more effective and self-disciplined. The compromising notion of the job and being in search were still dominant themes. While he keeps exploring alternatives, this is mainly to diversify his routine and additionally to his regular job develop something that he also likes doing and that would give him an additional little income and maybe more flexibility. He seeks to listen to his inner voice to become more relaxed and to organise his work around things he really likes doing. Developing a new approach towards work thereby is a central aim. This new approach has also taken away some tension from the relationship with his partner. However, a key pattern that could already be identified during the long period of identifying the 'right' training and subsequent job for him relate to struggling with himself and soul-searching to create something that matches his interests, skills, personality and desire for flexibility and creativity. Paul finds it hard to make compromises and, eventually, stick to them.

4.3.9. Martin 40s, injobber (activation programme to get unemployed into the labour market)

Martin is an iconic case and details of his career are given in Section 4.4 of the main report.

4.3.10. Nina, 30s, business communications clerk at a radio and TV station

First interview: July 2012

Follow-up interview: March 2013

4.3.10.1. Bio sketch

Nina is in her 30s, married and has two small children. During the first interview she was on maternity leave for one year with her second child a few weeks before returning to work, while during the second interview she had been back at her former workplace for six months.

After finishing school with the *Realschulabschluss* Nina did an apprenticeship as business communications clerk at a regional radio and television station in northern Germany. She continued with this employer for another two years before following her partner to another major city about 300 km away. Before moving she sought new employment and started to work with another regional radio and television station at the new location, but changed from an office job to work as editorial assistant, which she liked very much. She stayed in this position until having her first child and going on maternity leave for a year. When returning to work one year later Nina decided to continue part-time. As a result, she was switched back to the office where she was doing pension schemes until she went on maternity leave with her second child. When the first interview was conducted Nina had six more weeks before returning to work again. She was expecting to continue with this same job when getting back.

Nina's career narrative revolves around balancing a pronounced work orientation with her family life in a fairly traditional way, accommodating the career of her husband and own family values by working part-time and switching to less challenging work. Her life is structured around a clear family priority, but at the same time Nina also displays a clearly expressed work dedication. Work thereby fulfils a social, networking and recognition function rather than personal fulfilment or securing an income. Nina seeks stable and continuous employment and a job she likes, but without having any particular career or learning ambitions in the near future.

4.3.10.2. Contextualisation

Nina started working at the age of 16 and has a fairly long and continuous work history. She was selected to pick up the issue of a discontinuous career based on her experience of moving in and out of employment due to taking maternity

leave. Nina was interviewed twice, the first time when she was just before returning to work (after having been home for almost a year) and a second time after she had been back at her former workplace since about six months. Both interviews were conducted face-to-face at her home; the first one lasted one hour, the second one 45 minutes.

4.3.10.3. *Work biography*

After secondary education Nina did an apprenticeship at a regional radio and television station as business communications clerk (*Kauffrau für Bürokommunikation*) and was afterwards taken on as regular, full-time employee. During the following two years she worked with this employer, but was mainly job hopping, being assigned to different workplaces on demand. Through this rotation scheme she got to know the three main areas of administration, the department for television and the department for radio. Sometimes she was rotating between departments and even had to take up different assignments several times per day.

Subsequently, Nina moved to another major city in the north of Germany to follow her partner who had a new job there. She was lucky to find a job to continue in her domain and started working for the local television and radio station, but in the field of film making. This means Nina switched from providing administrative support in the office to work as editorial assistant. This job involved mainly two types of tasks, one area covering the administration of film production starting from reading and selecting the scripts to contacting and casting the actors, and the other area related to being in charge of the organisation on set, coordinating visitors like journalists and photographers and also coordinating work processes related to the immediate film production process. Nina did this job full time for three years until going for the first time for one year on maternity leave when having her first child. When returning to her former workplace Nina had to change position as from the employer's perspective the job of editorial assistant could not be performed part-time. Although Nina would have liked to stay there and also had a colleague with whom she had arranged to try a job sharing model the employer rejected the idea, mainly saying that the handing over on set would not work and be too complicated. Thus Nina was reassigned to work in the office on a part-time basis (50%). In the office she is now responsible for the calculation of pension schemes, benefits and employer transfers.

4.3.10.4. *Transitions*

Most decisive transition

For Nina the most decisive transition has been the change of employer, which combined with moving to another city and starting a completely new life away

from her parents, friends, colleagues, etc., Nina liked her former workplace and employer very much and never dreamed of having to leave this place. Rather, in her imagination and plans she saw herself working for this employer until reaching the retirement age. She loved her job and did not want to leave. She says she was very sad having to leave everything behind and starting anew was very difficult for her. In this period of transition Nina received most support from her new colleagues and her partner. She clearly stated that she had moved only for the relationship as her partner had gotten a new job in another city. Nina herself did not have any motivation whatsoever to change her life since 'everything was perfect'. It took Nina about one year to get used to the new job and her new life with periods when she very strongly wanted to go back. A main reason was her (female) supervisor whom Nina found difficult to work with. Despite her continued efforts to meet expected demands she did not get any recognition for her work and felt that her efforts were not seen and being recognised. This, however, was not constantly the case as there were also periods during which everything went well. Overall, Nina described her former boss as moody and unpredictable. In the end Nina accepted this to be her character and tried not to take any offence personally (as her boss treated other colleagues the same way), but rather sought to take things easy because, on the other hand, Nina really liked her job. In the end it was also the encouragement from her partner that made her stay on as well as from other colleagues who encouraged her in her work, assuring Nina that she was performing well. Her family and former friends rather supported her in the idea of going back to her former workplace.

'My former colleagues were sad. But in the end they said that, well, it was my decision. But it might as well just not have worked out. It could have been that I really regretted this move saying to myself 'of my God, that other job was so much better, why on earth have I done this, why did I give it up?' In the end I found it all very risky, particularly because I did not get a permanent contract. I only had a temporary contract and it could well have been that my employer said 'well, we don't want you' or 'we can't keep you'. Or that I don't make it through the probation period or that I myself think it doesn't work out. And for this I gave up everything! I had resigned, given up my apartment, my friends. Well, I could have gone back to my friends and family, but without having a job. And without work it would not have made any sense. And this really gave me a strange feeling, all this for a temporary contract! And this gave me a really bad feeling, because I was afraid that it all wouldn't work out and then I would have lost everything. This in fact was my greatest worry, that I would have lost my secured backup, that I don't have a job anymore.'

This passage illustrated very well Nina's strong work orientation and how central working is in her life.

Getting back to work after maternity leave

Before returning to work at Nina's workplace employees typically have a meeting with their employer to talk about possible new assignments and tasks. When it was clear that Nina could not go back to work on the set she was offered an office job to do the pension schemes. She said that almost immediately she rejected this offer, because she thought this would be a totally boring job. It was a colleague and the person she works with today who persuaded her and who also offered to try it out for several days before deciding. It was through this colleague that Nina finally accepted and later discovered that the job can in fact be interesting. Today she very much appreciates that she took this decision and is happy where she is today. Also, the transition from getting back to work and into this job went very well, mainly due to the nice colleagues who trained her on the job. She also found it easy to manage the family commitments in parallel to her part-time position. One reason, Nina reflects, might be that she knows that her children are well taken care of so that she does not have to worry about how they might be when Nina is at work. In the first interview Nina expressed that when returning to work after the maternity leave this may be different because with two children she may be more worried that it all work out. She anticipated that with two children it may become more difficult.

Future career prospects

Nina hopes that at some point there will be possibilities for her to move on in her career, but at the moment she does not see how, first because her priority is currently given to her children but also because her formal qualification does not really provide for a substantial career move. She would be ready to engage in further training, but not at the moment and not in the coming years, but rather when she has more time. She thinks that she is still young and has enough time to explore things. At the moment, however, this is not on her mind. But Nina thinks that her employer would support her if she really wanted to move up based on further training courses. So far, some of the training she has done related to pension schemes have been employer direct, not on Nina's initiative. More intensive courses normally cover several days and also take place in the south of Germany, which would make it difficult for Nina to attend. Actually, she has not sought about any kind of other courses that would extend beyond her current job tasks she would like to attend. A more planned career progression through further training is not realistic for her at the moment. Even the option to potentially become a team leader, as Nina says, is only realistic when the kids are grown up as this position requires considerable more engagement with work. Nina also stated that it may not be completely out of the way that she applied to a different job with another employer if something interesting would come up.

4.3.10.5. *Emerging themes*

Compatibility of work demands and family demands

Of all the positions and tasks Nina has done thus far she liked working as editing assistant most. Particularly being on the film set was exciting and interesting. There she had to interact with different people, including the actors, designers, technicians, stage directors, etc. The job, however, was also very hectic and involved working extra hours and also sometimes taking work home. In a way Nina can understand that this job is difficult to do part-time. On the other hand, Nina also thinks that this job would be too stressful when having kids as it is too demanding and involves a high degree of flexibility, not only time flexibility but also mind flexibility and being able to manage a broad variety of challenges. Nina states that with the two little children at home her mind would not be free for such a demanding job and that she prefers to have a more continuous and quiet job with her now complex family commitments. Thus, it is not just the working hours that make her work more compatible with her family commitments, but also having a less demanding job helps her to balance work and the family. The office job where she is responsible for the pension schemes, in her view, is thus the ideal combination as she has no deadlines and can work without time pressure. She cannot imagine that she would have managed working as editorial assistant and being a mother at the same time.

‘And this is really the point, that there just isn’t so much pressure and that I don’t have to be worried when my kids are sick and I can’t come to work for two weeks because I have other commitments and I have to stay home. In this respect my employer is really flexible and family friendly. And this is really nice and makes me enjoy my job, that I don’t have to be afraid of maybe, in the worst case, losing my job because I can’t come to work.’

Realising working and having a family

Nina presents an interesting case of work and family balance. On the one hand, Nina’s job and individual career are clearly secondary both to family demands and also to the career of her husband. In this regard Nina represents a traditional family arrangement and female role model. For herself she is also not pursuing a career or any form of progressive learning for her own professional development (in her view, if at all this would have to wait until the kids are grown-up). On the other hand, Nina displays a strong and clearly pronounced work orientation and dedication, whereby working fulfils a whole range of functions by not being linked to having or making a career. A key aspect here is keeping a certain degree of financial and social independence. Her work orientation was underlined by various developments:

- (a) Nina did not follow her partner to the new city before having secured own employment. This took six months during which they had a distant relationship. Having own employment and a job similar to and up to the level of her previous job was a precondition for Nina to move;
- (b) Nina really missed going to work when she was on maternity leave. 'Just staying home' is not enough for her and she was eager to get back to work. Working thereby in the first place fulfils a social and networking function and getting social recognition apart from securing a secondary income. Important aspects thereby are having a stable and continuous employment and a job that she likes, but that at the same time is not too demanding. In this sense Nina has very clear ideas about her work and family life. Interestingly, Nina represents this very traditional role model while being the youngest participant of the sample. She clearly stated that having children is not compatible with working full time, the logic being that 'if I decide to have children I also want to spend time with them, educate them, see them growing up';
- (c) Nina waited to plan her pregnancy until she was made permanent so that she could secure long-term employment. With this permanent contract Nina also secured her entitlement to a full-time position, which, however she can reduce in terms of working hours if she likes. Currently she is planning to keep the part-time arrangement until her second child starts schooling (which would be in six years time). Thus, Nina did not just secure long-term job security but also the right to a full-time position with her employer, which needs to be at an equal or higher level with her former job (while the employer may assign her to another position Nina cannot be downgraded in terms of her salary).

These decisions demonstrate her strategic approach to working life. Overall, for her the combination of working part time and having children is the ideal combination – in this way she can have both. This combination gives her a high degree of satisfaction and she says that she is much more satisfied when she works rather than just being home with the kids. She needs both to have a balanced life. With two small children, however, she also realised that juggling this combination might become more difficult and stressful.

'For me it was absolutely clear that if I would have wanted to make a career then only without having children. For me personally this does not go together. I don't say it's not possible, but I wouldn't have wanted it for myself. For me, if I decide to have children, it was clear that I then subordinate any career interests to my children's wellbeing and that I rather take the time to take care of my children, to be able to care for them well, like I think it is best for them. [...] I am sure that there are many women who can manage it differently, but I wouldn't have wanted it for myself.'

4.3.10.6. *Learning*

Although Nina completed an apprenticeship within and for her area of work she says that for the three different positions she has had so far none really required her to apply what she had learnt during her training, but that all the skills and knowledge she needed in the respective jobs were trained on-the-job. Of the three positions the first one was probably closest to her initial vocational training. Here Nina worked in the head office department of administration and personnel.

4.3.10.7. *Follow-up interview (March 2013)*

Main development: return to work after maternity leave to work in the former department and position continuing part-time (50%) while now having two small children.

Nina opened the follow-up interview with the statement that there had not been any changes and that she had nothing to tell. The interview, however, lasted 45 minutes.

(a) Theme 1: returning back to work

During the second interview Nina had returned to work about six months ago. She worked in the same department like before, basically continuing the same job as before with having the same colleagues. She was also sitting at her former desk. She said that apart from catching up with some new work processes and software her job had not changed. She found it relatively easy to get back into the daily routine. Only the first one or two weeks were more stressful and everything felt a bit strange. The person who temporarily had replaced Nina provided information and support to help Nina get back into the routine. She was really eager to get back to work and have some distraction from just being at home. She was looking forward to it, also to see her colleagues and just to get out of the house and do something else than just minding the baby. She said it soon felt as if she had never been away, above all not for a whole year.

(b) Theme 2: balancing work and family commitments

While in Nina's view the transition back to work has been easy, working and having two small kids is a major difference to the situation before. Overall combining work and family demands has become quite stressful. She recognised, however, that the more stressful part derives from her family situation – that with two small children she is always under pressure and being able to work half day requires a lot of coordination and organisation. Then there is also pressure due to the kids being sick frequently and that then she cannot go to work. Or that she has to get up several times at night and then cannot perform well or concentrate well at work the following day. That she is limited in her work performance due to family commitments was brought up several times.

'Yes, often I cannot concentrate, my mind is somewhere else and I am also very tired. This sucks. Definitely, I feel the tiredness and that I am not concentrating and that there are so many things in my head. At least in my case, so many things are on my mind that when being at work I think about all these things that I still have to do at home, any appointments?, there you have to go. And then you think 'oh my God, I must not forget anything, just keep everything under control!' And then it is natural that when you have your mind set on something else that you cannot concentrate on your job. But this is something I have to work out for myself, to tell myself 'now you are at work, you cannot think about all these other issues and you really have to focus on your job!'

When she had returned to work, during the first months the kids were sick frequently so that Nina had to stay home often. There was pressure from her colleagues, but also if she is absent the work is not being done. In addition, there is this inner pressure that frequent absenteeism could even be a reason for dismissal. Then Nina also rationalised that maybe she is the one who puts pressure on herself rather than her colleagues. In fact, her colleagues may be sympathising with her situation. While Nina's husband also partly stayed home when the kids were sick and they took turns, Nina covered the major part. Compensating her absenteeism by working from home or long hours or on week-ends has so far not come up as a solution. But Nina also thinks that she would not have the time and would not like to do that.

Compared to the job as editorial assistant, her situation has changed completely. Back then her mind was always rotating by thinking about her job. She had to work long hours and even when she was at home, she thought about work. This often resulted in conflicts with her partner. Now it is the reverse: when being at work her mind is rotating around the kids and the household and she cannot concentrate on her job.

(c) Theme 3: complying with different demands including self-expectations

In the first place Nina has a bad conscience in terms of her work performance and because she cannot dedicate herself fully to her job. She herself has fairly high performance expectations. Considering her children she thinks that they are well taken care of. They both like being in the nursery with the other kids, so that, at her work, Nina does not feel bad. However, Nina raised the issue of being torn between the child care and household duties and that she would like to spend more time with the kids when she is actually home in the afternoons and just have a more relaxed time together. But in the end she is often busy with the household duties and keeping appointments so that she is also stressed when being at home. As a consequence, Nina has reduced the number of regular appointments as she

wants to have more free time for the kids and herself. She mentioned that these are her concrete projects through which she hopes to better balance her different and complex commitments: First to concentrate better at work and second to have more relaxed and quality time with her children when being at home.

Then Nina also thinks that maybe it would be good to do something for herself. Currently she works four days five hours per day so that she has the Friday off. She thought that maybe on the Friday she could just relax and do something for herself. But in the end she uses the Friday morning to do the shopping and clean the house. And since there is always so much to do, she would feel bad when just using this time for herself. Nina stated that this has reached a level that she is constantly restless and cannot just be sitting somewhere, but is always busy with something. She has a household help that comes once a week. This helps, but does not really make a difference. Nina also considered that maybe she is just not well organised or not efficient. She ultimately saw the cause of being sometimes over-challenged within herself.

‘I even have somebody who is helping me once a week. And this helps a little bit, it is just not so much to do. I think that without the household help I wouldn’t get anywhere. But maybe I am just not able to handle it all. Sometimes I think, because I just don’t have the energy. But maybe I also need to get used to it. Maybe it takes time, that with time it will become easier. Or maybe I am not well organised, I don’t know, but could also be.’

Nina’s goal is that everybody is happy and satisfied and she sees herself responsible to make this happen. She has high expectations on herself, but sometimes is just totally exhausted – and she goes to sleep at 7:30 p.m. when the kids are in bed. She says that she feels externally controlled and manipulated.

(d) Theme 4: support structures

Asked about from where Nina gets support or how she concretely seeks to put her ‘two projects’ into practice she said that most support comes from colleagues and friends who are in a similar situation through mutual exchange, encouragement and understanding. Asked about the role of her husband Nina said: ‘I think my husband sometimes, well, men can’t really understand this situation. They tend to have their usually regular full-time job and they don’t have to juggle all these family appointments. I think he should for one week just do all this, take the kids here, take them there, pick them up, go there, run the household and then additionally go to work and so on. Men usually don’t have that. They don’t really know how it is like. I think that he probably, well he surely wouldn’t be delighted, he would not enjoy doing all this.’

To manage the double demands in practice the network of parents of the kindergarten are very supportive apart from the household help Nina has contracted. Nina stated that she regrets that the grandparents are not around (they live further away) to provide support like it is the case in some families. On the side of the emotional and psychological pressures Nina is basically trying to figure out how to improve things on her own, trying to plan things better or trying to be more relaxed, for example. In terms of learning at work it is again the colleagues who are providing most support. The older colleagues in particular dispose a broad knowledge and expertise, some of whom have been with the company for over 30 years.

(e) Theme 5: returning to work – comparing the first and the second time

After the first maternity leave Nina had changed departments and areas of work and her workplace and everything was new: the area of work, the tasks, the department, the team, her working hours, etc. She said that this felt like a new start. When returning after the second maternity leave it felt more like having been on a long holiday – and just getting back to her old workplace. Thus, the first transition back to work has been much more difficult and complex. It was her colleague who sat together with Nina over months to familiarise her with the work processes and concrete tasks. On the other hand, everything was much easier with just one child. In particular, Nina thinks that when she returned to work the first time her child had not been sick very much and everything was still easier to handle. She also thinks that she had been generally more relaxed.

(f) Theme 6: future transitions

Nina anticipates another major change when her older son will start schooling in one year time. Then she will have to be home by 1:00 p.m. and will thus need to rearrange her working time to five days per week of four hours each. She has already talked about this with her supervisor. Nina is not happy about the idea that she will lose her Friday at home and also that overall she will spend more time commuting. However, she does not see any other possible solution. The other alternative would be to reduce to 16 hours per week or so, but Nina does not want to work less hours than she currently works. They also discussed that Nina may want to increase her working hours when the kids are teenagers, probably when the smaller one will be 14 years or so. Such planning in the future shows that Nina has a long-term planning approach towards work and employment. Nina considers that even in 10 years' time she will still be young in the sense that even at the age of 40 or older she will also still have to work for a considerable period of time. This shows that in a way Nina is planning her working life until retirement age.

4.3.11. Andrea, 30s, physiotherapist

First interview: July 2012

Follow-up interview: March 2013

4.3.11.1. Bio sketch

Andrea lives together with her husband and three small children. After completion of secondary education she went for one year to a vocational school for social work before being old enough to enter the three-year physiotherapist training programme. She has since then worked as a physiotherapist, first for four years full-time and, after having had her first child, part-time. Her part-time employment has mainly been marginally, i.e. earning less than EUR 400 per months. However, alongside Andrea pursued several major specialisation courses, most recently to specialise in child physiotherapy.

Her narrative revolves around balancing work and family life by at the same time deepening her own expertise to become more specialised to work in areas she is interested in. This is in line with following a clear professional track. Gradually, Andrea would like to increase her working hours from currently 40 to 60 hours per months.

4.3.11.2. Contextualisation

Due to the so far clearly defined professional route, both interviews were fairly straight forward telephone interviews, the first one lasting for 40 and the second one for 30 minutes. Since Andrea has so far not experienced any major or disruptive career transitions in her work biography, the focus was placed on learning and how learning can support career development.

4.3.11.3. Work biography

Physiotherapy has always been Andrea's dream job. Already at the age of 16 when still being at school she knew she wanted to train in this domain. Consequently, her first internship while at school in Grade 9 was in physiotherapy and this first practical work experience in the field made Andrea being sure that this would also be her future professional career path. After having completed two extra school years in the social field to bridge the time until she was old enough to start the training (in Germany the minimum age is 18), Andrea started to train as physiotherapist in 1995 and completed the school-based vocational training programme three years later. Immediately afterwards she got her first job and worked for this employer full-time until going on maternity leave when she had her first child. In her current job Andrea works with disabled and developmentally retarded children below the age of 15 years, often also with new-born babies. She works in an institution connected to a children's hospital but also goes into kindergartens and other child care facilities. Her job requires a

high degree of time flexibility, e.g. sometimes it is expected that patients are being seen during evening hours.

This means, Andrea has ever since worked as physiotherapist, first for four years full-time and, after having had her first baby, she continued part-time. Since that time her part-time employment has mainly been marginal, i.e. earning less than EUR 400 per months. To compensate the lack of job involvement due to her family commitments, Andrea additionally followed several major specialisations, most recently to specialise in child physiotherapy. With having three children, Andrea's narrative evolves around balancing work and family life by at the same time deepening her own expertise to become more specialised to work in areas she is interested in. Working with children in physiotherapy has been the main focus and Andrea is sure that this is the right direction for her future work. While she used the years of few working hours due to child care responsibilities to deepen her expertise and getting the desired formal qualification to work with children, Andrea is aiming to gradually work more hours. During the first interview Andrea was planning to increase her working hours from 40 to 60 hours per months.

When looking back Andrea is happy with the way her work biography has developed and she would again pick the same vocational field and professional route. She has no unfulfilled or unrealised professional dreams.

4.3.11.4. *Transitions*

Future expectations and transitions

Apart from increasing her working hours Andrea does not expect any changes in her job or professional field, only that in terms of knowledge it is required to stay up-to-date which implies a high engagement with continuing learning.

4.3.11.5. *Emerging themes*

Support structures

Support structures were less an issue in terms of supporting Andrea in following a specific career pathway or to get to work, but rather in terms of supporting her learning and further training at various levels. Andrea receives much support from her family with having the grandparents from both sides close by who take over child care responsibilities. This enabled Andrea to sometimes be on intensive training courses that might last for three weeks. Still, lack of appropriate child care to follow training courses emerged as a major theme as apparently there is no institutional support in this respect. Child care facilities are typically targeted to support mothers who are working but not if they are in training.

Overall, temporal and flexible child care facilities are not available, highly bureaucratic and very complicated to arrange.

Professional choice

When Andrea was 13, her father fell ill and needed to get physiotherapy at home for a longer period of time. Andrea got interested and involved and this was how she decided that this would be her dream profession. Her parents subsequently encouraged her to follow this path and also supported her decision along the way. For example, the initial training of three years is fairly costly and was financially supported by Andrea's parents. Also all further trainings are fairly costly. It was difficult to get a training place initially, but job opportunities afterwards were very good.

4.3.11.6. Learning

Learning has always played a key role for Andrea, partly compensating her low volume of working hours. Most training courses were formal courses leading to a specialist certification, some courses lasting for one to two years and taking place during weekends, evenings and block sessions of several weeks. All the courses Andrea took were geared towards specialising in working with children. This has also been something Andrea had been very clear about already at an early stage of her career. Here a clear goal in terms of career direction can be identified and Andrea has always strategically pursued this path, thereby using formal learning and training as a means to achieve her professional goals. Thus, learning has been instrumental in supporting Andrea to develop her professional direction and specialisation. However, due to the great part of child care responsibilities Andrea has, learning has partly been restricted and needed to be adjusted to her family situation.

Her current employer largely supports further learning and training and offers to the employees to go to and visit all kinds of further training courses. The next training Andrea would like to pursue is on respiration therapy. While in the beginning after completion of her initial training Andrea was surprised and very sceptical about continuing training being something that is expected in her profession it has now become a very important and supporting part of Andrea's professional life. Also reading expert books in her free time is an important aspect of learning for her. Andrea is highly motivated and engages a lot in self-initiated learning. However, there is also some pressure to stay up-to-date in her professional field. As a beginner it has become increasingly difficult to enter the job as various specialisations are expected by employers. However, large parts of the further training also need to be funded by the employees and Andrea actually invested quite some money in her specialisation and training courses. In

some instances the employer cofunded part of the training. In addition, most of the training takes place on week-ends.

For Andrea formal learning plays a central role and is highly valued. In further trainings and seminars Andrea values that in this environment people with different professional backgrounds and expertise come together which is a good framework for professional exchange. Another framework for exchanging professional expertise is in the team, in particular in the larger hospital environment.

4.3.11.7. *Follow-up interview (March 2013)*

Main development: Andrea has changed positions and increased her working hours as she was planning. She is now working a little more than 60 hours per month.

(a) Theme 1: new work situation with working more hours

One of the key aims in terms of future changes Andrea expressed during the first interview was to increase her working hours, which she did. When the second interview was conducted she was working a bit more than 60 hours per month in comparison to 40 hours per months like before. Together with her employer she explored the different possible and optimal work schemes as effectively Andrea can only work in the mornings when the kids are being taken care of. The employer was very flexible so that in the end Andrea only has one long day per week and can do all the rest of her working hours in the mornings. This is very important for her. On this particular day the children are taken care of by their grandparents. That her employer is family friendly and seeks to accommodate Andrea's needs is very important for her and contributes significantly to the fact that Andrea is relaxed and experiences the work-family balance as a situation without conflicting demands. She does not actually feel that she is working more hours as her working schemes are absolutely reliable and every week is pre-planned according to her schedules.

(b) Theme 2: learning

In her new position, Andrea has started to engage in a new internal learning process whereby in a group of four she has weekly exchange together with colleagues as concerns the health developments of her patients. She describes this as an internal further training concept that also involves cooperation with external institutions and bringing together knowledge and background information e.g. on particular diagnosis by consulting the Internet or books, for example. Sometimes they also discuss in the team new practices, for example if one of the four had been to a training course she will report on her experience. Every week the team decides on a thematic focus. This group-based learning is very much supported by the

management and has a positive impact on the quality of work and the services provided on a day-to-day basis. In addition, Andrea has followed some other further training courses, also one on communications that was done in the team. This training involved conflict resolution and drama sequences all participants were sceptical about, but which in the end turned out to have been very interesting and effective. It provided for a new open approach so that the colleagues got to know each other better and reached a new level of understanding.

4.3.12. Brigitte, 30s, vocational advisor

First interview: April 2012

Follow-up interview: March 2013

4.3.12.1. Bio sketch

Brigitte is married with a young daughter. She lives and schooled in a medium-size town in the former East. As she finished school at the time of the reunification, new career opportunities opened up and Brigitte went to a *Berufsakademie* specialising in commerce and economics. After the three years training she first worked for a small company and then started working for the local employment agency, first in the administration/accountancy department to then gradually move into the position of vocational counsellor. This involved going through several application processes and changing job positions for four times before getting to her current position. Although all these applications had been with the same employer, Brigitte in some cases had to apply as external, which once implied having to quit her job to be considered, but at the same time taking the risk of not being selected. In the end, she was lucky that she got the job.

Brigitte sees her career as progressively advancing against her own strategic approach and having confidence in her skills, but also risk taking and having been lucky a couple of times. She might consider moving on, but at this point in time feels that she still needs to give priority to her family. At the same time she recognises that further promotion would be highly competitive and would require significant input in terms of learning and time commitment she is not ready for at the moment and she may also not want for the future. While clearly career oriented, Brigitte had reduced her working hours by 20% when the second interview was conducted, seeking to give more room to her family.

4.3.12.2. Contextualisation

I met Brigitte at a mother-child vacation and asked her whether she would be interested in doing an interview when I found out that she was working full-time. Since in Germany the gendered labour market to date is still very differently

structured between the new and the old Federal states, Brigitte exemplifies the career approach of formerly East German female workers who seek to combine in parallel a strong work and family orientation (working full-time with children). The first interview lasted 55 minutes. The follow-up interview was conducted by telephone a year later and lasted 40 minutes.

4.3.12.3. *Work biography*

Brigitte works and lives in a medium-size town (20 000) in one of the new Federal States (Saxony). After completion of secondary school and the *Abitur* with a specialisation in economics Brigitte, in 1998, completed her vocational training at a *Berufsakademie*, which is a special dual work and study programme of three years available only in the Federal states of Saxony and Baden-Württemberg. The programme is based on an employment contract with a company and a study contract with the *Berufsakademie*. Her final degree could probably be compared to a dual bachelor in business administration combined with practical work experience.

In her first job Brigitte worked as assistant to the management of a small company, which, however, had to close down after a short period of time. Brigitte then was looking for another job and did, to bridge the time and not to run the risk of being unemployed for a longer period of time, a nine-month further qualification programme in quality assurance and staff development in another city. Brigitte then became pregnant and went on maternity leave for one year before she started working with the local employment agency ⁽¹⁷⁾. She initially applied as 'team assistant' and worked at the service desk. During the last 10 years she has been working with the employment agency but in four different positions of which the first three were temporary positions before Brigitte became permanent. She has worked full-time in all these jobs, mainly because this was what was desired by the employer but also this was what Brigitte wanted. This represents her strong work orientation.

'Well, it's both [financial and personal reasons]. This is how I grew up, I haven't seen anything else, that's the typical DDR-child, both parents working full-time, both grandparents having worked full-time, and, thank God, that in my life it could also always be adjusted that way, that it has always worked out for me as well.'

With her daughter now changing schools there is some consideration of reducing her working hours for the next one to two years to support this transition period. But this is just a vague idea and not really part of the family's planning.

⁽¹⁷⁾ The Federal Employment Agency can be regarded as one public employer, but is stratified at the national, regional and local level following different administrative logics.

Brigitte initially applied to the employment agency as 'team assistant' working at the service point for clients, i.e. being the first contact person when people walk into the agency and refer them to other departments or contact people. This first contract was only for three months. Although Brigitte had the option to renew her contract she decided not to renew it, but to apply for another vacancy with the same employer to work in the department in charge of calculating unemployment benefits and other transfers. To get this position Brigitte had to apply as external candidate, thus the rejection of contract renewal was a precondition to be eligible for applying. Luckily, she got the job, partly based on her former commitment but still being in an open, competitive selection process. While her second contract was also temporary, Brigitte then got the chance to apply internally to a vacancy in the department that provided services for employers and coordinated job offers. After this position she was offered a permanent position at the counselling department that provides guidance for students, job seekers and career changers.

With these different positions, which also reflect a minor, but gradually progressive career development (also in terms of higher remuneration and also levels of responsibility) Brigitte has now almost covered the whole spectrum of main departments of the employment agency.

Brigitte has now been in her current job since 1.5 years. It mainly involves providing information for and advising students of *Haupt-* and *Realschule* in their vocational orientation to facilitate their school-to-work transition and to find an apprenticeship. The advisory services she provides are voluntary for the students. Students come to her office, but she also informs clients at conferences and public events and goes into the schools. This involves considerable coordination and networking activities apart from just dealing with the young clients. If desired, students can also ask her for practical help, like, for example, writing a job application.

4.3.12.4. *Transitions*

Moving from the commercial field into management assistant to the employment agency

Brigitte initially trained in commerce. Consequently, she wanted to get her first job in this field, but the interesting jobs, for example in logistics, were rare in the former East and Brigitte would have had to commute to realise the kinds of jobs she would have liked to do. The alternative, to work in retail, was not attractive for her. Therefore, she was looking for alternatives. Basically, she wanted to do accountancy and tried different business consultancies, but was not successful. Through a friend she finally got a job in the accountancy department of a larger market gardening firm, where Brigitte got to be involved in many different areas

including marketing, public relations services, management, administration, developing a new wage plan, etc., Brigitte liked this type of job and the variety of tasks very much. She sees this to be the advantage of working for a smaller company that she could be responsible for many different tasks and learn a lot. Here Brigitte discovered her potentials for working creatively and flexibly and assuming a whole range of tasks and developing new skills through challenging work. At the employment agency, by contrast, the division of labour and specialisation of tasks are much stricter. Ultimately, in such a big organisation Brigitte can only use some of her skills and her responsibilities are much more clearly and narrowly defined.

Getting back into employment after maternity leave

Brigitte identifies that she by purpose redirected her career when she started working for the employment agency when returning to work after maternity leave. Switching from a private to a public employer had to do with job security and seeking more stable employment.

Transitions in the future (Where do you see yourself in 15 years?)

Brigitte now, finally, has a permanent contract. Some changes she can foresee will be connected to the restructuring process of the employment agency, which will imply new divisions of tasks, new specialised fields and this may also redefine Brigitte's job. However, for her it is important to have a challenging job with various tasks, responsibilities and challenges and this is where she sees herself regardless of any particular employer. One scenario, for example, might be that the employment agency may become privatised. Then, Brigitte says, she would probably try to go back and seek a job in a private company connecting to what she has been doing in her first job, i.e. assistance to the management or similar areas. In any case, no matter what will happen to her current employer Brigitte is self-confident that she will find an interesting and challenging job somewhere else. She also expressed some concrete ideas where she could see herself in the future. A basis of this self-confidence has been the learning processes she underwent in terms of being sure to be able to rely on her own skills and that she is a fast and effective learner. She is confident that despite the prejudice that if you once worked for a public employer you will not make the transition again to get a job at a private company. Brigitte does not believe in it and says that only people who have never worked for a public employer say so. Brigitte feels that rationalisation and restructuring puts high pressure on the employees and also makes the working environment she is in highly competitive.

Career advancement in the future

There are several options available to move further up the career ladder, including special programmes from the employer to support women. And Brigitte would probably be a welcome candidate for it and be supported. However, there are some reasons that prevent Brigitte at the moment to follow a more distinct career progression route. One reason is that this would involve higher levels of mobility and commuting and that Brigitte would lose the local embedding. Most likely, she would have to work in a different town or across Germany and would be moved around. Second, moving further up would lead Brigitte into a leadership position which she considers would require a lot of energy and personal resources not only to get there, but also to stay there. At the moment, she feels she does not want to invest that much energy in making a career, also because her family still is a priority and she is not regionally mobile. Apart from some regional mobility during her vocational qualification programmes Brigitte has mainly stayed and lived in the same region.

Most difficult transition

Retrospectively, the most difficult transition for Brigitte has been getting into the labour market after graduating from her vocational training. This had to do with the reunification and the regional labour market having been particularly closed and difficult to enter as there were no jobs available. Back then Brigitte was unemployed for three months before finding employment.

Patterns of managing transition

Although Brigitte encountered several work and job transitions, partly under conditions of very difficult labour market situations, she assesses that in the end she has always been fairly lucky in finding an interesting job and even in getting a place at the *Berufsakademie* (which was very competitive at that time). This reflects the combination of being proactive in terms of job seeking and engagement with the application processes (many of Brigitte's job applications were unsolicited applications), being creative (e.g. undergoing a further qualification when no job was available), being flexible in redirecting skills and interests and also being prepared to take risks (e.g. trading in a contract renewal for the opportunity to apply for a better paid job). While Brigitte has always been adjusting very little in terms of mobility, she has been highly adaptable in many other aspects including taking self-initiative in terms of learning and trying out new things, even if they were below her qualification and not in her professional area. This underlines her distinct work orientation. To be mobile and explore other regional labour markets would have been another option – and Brigitte set herself a limit of trying for six months to find a job in the region but move on to something else if she would not have been successful.

'I set myself a deadline of about a half year during which I wanted first of all to explore the regional labour market to then find out how do I have to set the circle to find something interesting. [...] Then I would have moved elsewhere. I mean, I would not have started as an unskilled worker if I could have had a good job some 50 or 100 kilometres further away. [...] Well, in the end, this is the wrong starting point also from my own experience is this the wrong approach, according to my view, to focus on what is being offered. The process rather should be the other way around: 'what is it that I want, what are my actual skills'? Because only then can I become happy and satisfied with my job. And this is also the approach that I then tried to follow and also to convey this to partly fairly depressed individuals. But well, as a young career counsellor, who seeks to give advice to some 40 or 50-year old who hasn't got any prospects, I probably wasn't that successful, above all because the labour market was really dead. But what I am trying now to say to the students and to bring it to their heart, because they really have the chance, even in the countryside there are so many new profiles, job descriptions I haven't even heard of, where I myself need to get some information, read something about, what is he actually doing, how long does the training last, where are the jobs available? That people should follow this route, 'what do I want, what are my skills, what are my interests? What was it that I liked doing when I was young? Or, what is it that I like doing today?' And then find something that fits.'

She recognised that not having worked under the old regime (she was 13 years when the reunification took place and was still in school) might have been at a great advantage and fostered her creativity in job seeking and career adaptation as compared to some of her older clients, who are irritated and depressed through having experienced the restructuring of the labour market and having been faced with job insecurity and unemployment, which was virtually non-existent under the former regime.

To the question whether Brigitte would have liked to follow another route she reflects that she has been fairly lucky and is also quite happy with the way her professional career developed. However, she also has a strong interest in history and chemistry. Also, because in her work she is confronted with so many professional directions and areas, she sometimes gets inspired so that she might have taken a different route if the possibilities had been there. She identifies her systematic approach towards working and learning as strength and pattern and this is something she seeks to realise in her job. If she has the scope to develop this in her daily work Brigitte is satisfied.

4.3.12.5. *Learning*

To adjust to the (five or more) different jobs Brigitte had had learning has played a key role, but less so formal learning than learning by doing. In this respect

Brigitte benefits from her great breadth of understanding and comprehension. Only for her last position as career advisor Brigitte got a three-month formal training provided by her employer as professionally she had a completely different background. This also partly was to fulfil some legal requirements to make sure that the counsellors have a set of basic qualifications in this area. The rest, Brigitte states, is learning by doing and learning from more experienced colleagues. Brigitte also works a lot with print outs from the computer that she herself organised into a little manual for herself to have all processes documented. This reflects how Brigitte creatively produces her own tools and methods to work effectively. She is also able to make connections easily between different processes and areas.

As Brigitte does not have the typical background of a career counsellor learning has been very central for her career. In addition to self-organised learning Brigitte also participates in various, very specific short-term training of 1-2 days (e.g. how to handle particular software). In any case, all learning takes place at the workplace as Brigitte does not learn for her work from home. This Brigitte describes as her personal limit – if the employer or her job requires learning Brigitte sees this to be part of her work. It thus has to be integrated in her working day. Here she draws a clear line between work and her private life.

4.3.12.6. *Follow-up interview (March 2013)*

Main development: Brigitte has reduced her working hours and is now working 80%, (32 hours per week). This was negotiated with her employer initially for a duration of 12 months and was partly a result of a reflection process inspired by the first interview.

(a) Theme 1: new workplace with same employer

As planned, Brigitte was transferred from the regional headquarters where she had undergone specialised familiarisation training to another branch to take over the position of a colleague who retired. So, while continuing with the same employer since the first interview Brigitte has changed her workplace, position, location (the new branch is in another town) and area of tasks, all of which was also related to a small promotion. However, as she had been working in this branch some time earlier she was already familiar with the workplace and also with some of the staff. Thus she returned to a branch where she had been working before, but with a new area of responsibilities and into a new team structure since in the meantime some staff had been replaced.

This replacement had been planned since about a year ago. Asked about the process how Brigitte was selected for the replacement she stated that this was somehow initiated from both sides – she was interested but she was also asked. Key motivations for this move had been that she liked the

colleagues and team work in her old branch better and wanted to move back. Second, after having worked for three years in one area she also wanted to do something else. Brigitte was aware that moving into the new position would require a training period of about six months in the regional headquarters. During the first interview this procedure had somehow already been decided. What was a new development, however, was that with moving to her new position Brigitte decided to reduce her working hours by 20%, now working about 32 hours per week.

In the past, Brigitte has had several job changes covering many different work areas. She thinks that this new position will provide for a more long-term perspective. First, because she is now made permanent and second because the employer is interested in some continuity for this new post. However, Brigitte thinks that if she wanted to change in the future to a new position within the organisation it would not be a problem. She thinks that in this position she cannot work to her full potential as she has many skills that are not used. At the same time she considers it probably to be the best position for her within the institution. If she would change employment in the future it may thus rather involve seeking work with another employer than moving again within the organisation: 'I am not married to my employer'. There may be economic but also political developments that may induce significant downsizing of staff in the near future. On the other hand, Brigitte is also aware that in her region it is very difficult to find adequate employment. That this significantly limits her employment and career possibilities was also brought up during the first interview. Still, for Brigitte it is unlikely that she will remain with her current employer until reaching the retirement age.

(b) Theme 2: reduction of working hours from full-time to 80%

Interestingly, the reduction of working hours in light of better balancing work and family commitments, but also to respect more her own needs, was initiated through the first interview, during which the issue of working full-time versus part-time was brought up. While against her East German socialisation working part-time has never been an option or on Brigitte's mind, it was the interview that made her think about the part-time option more in-depth. She then worked out a working scheme together with her employer that involves a reduction by 20% so that Brigitte now has every second Friday off. This arrangement has been agreed for one year to start with. When the second interview was conducted Brigitte had been working under this scheme for about seven months. Since she is now permanent Brigitte has some degree of flexibility in negotiating her working time. She stated that together with her family they decided that Brigitte shall continue with 80% for another two years given that she is entitled to working time

reduction until her daughter turns 18 (as she is currently 12 years old, in principle Brigitte could continue working part-time with this employer for another six years). One reason why Brigitte is more needed at home is that the family has built a house and much work still needs to be done on this end, too. Another reason is that she wants to be more flexible to support her daughter at school if needed. On the other hand, Brigitte does not want to fix her contract for the next six years as she may as well be wanting to go back to work full-time.

Asked about how she feels with this new arrangement Brigitte said that she feels more relaxed in terms of her private and family life since the Friday gives her the flexibility to organise some private things on this day. Alternatively, if it is not for appointments, etc., Brigitte can use this time for herself or also for the household work. On the other hand, she pointed out that in a way her job has become more stressful and that she needs to juggle the workload since she spends less hours in the office. In fact, while her working hours are now reduced Brigitte still has the same amount of work to do like when she was working full-time. This partly has to do with the internal reorganisation of work, but also because the part-time arrangement is not reflected in the job tasks given to her by the employer. Brigitte has put this in writing and during the interview she was optimistic that this somehow will be sorted out. She underlined that the problem also derives from her job description and responsibilities allocated to this position which is not realistic. So, on the one hand her job description needs to be adjusted and second it has to be taken into account that Brigitte now only works 80%.

For the future Brigitte and her husband have thought about a number of other possible working time arrangements. In principle, Brigitte could also imagine herself to work less hours, reducing maybe to up to 50%. But then the financial pressure would be too much. She said financially this is not an option, because she is the main earner in the family. Alternatively, they thought about maybe her husband working part-time as in the end it is the overall work-family balance that is important for them. The obstacle for her husband is that in the crafts business part-time work is not common and not possible. And for him to stop working altogether also is not possible financially.

(c) Theme 3: assessing the changes and transitions

While during the last year Brigitte's work situation changed and has been restructured to a significant degree, she herself did not perceive the last year as a major change or transition. She feels she has benefitted from a higher degree of autonomy – both at the family and the workplace – and organising and autonomous planning is something she finds easy and identifies with. Thus for her things have become easier (also with the new position and

higher level of responsibility), at least from the organisational and logistic side (e.g. her new workplace is also closer to her home). What Brigitte finds very difficult – but as she stated this is an old story – is to define her limits in terms of work demands and to make this clear to her employer. Both steps (i.e. identifying her limits and also express them) are a new exercise for Brigitte. Asked about what has been the most decisive change for her she stated that precisely this awareness of how important it is that she can express and accept her own limits is new and a very important insight. For her it is also a learning experience.

(d) Theme 4: learning

Her new position constitutes a new area of work, which requires completely new background knowledge and to some degree also new technical skills (e.g. software application). Thus, the new position involved a lot of learning. Brigitte stated that it takes about three to four years until she will feel absolutely comfortable with managing all the different tasks her job involves and that now she is about half way through. The learning was supported through the six months familiarisation training at the headquarters combined with learning from colleagues, learning-by-doing and also some former training. That the new position involved this high level of learning and learning demands was a motivation for Brigitte and part of the attraction of moving into this position. She likes new challenges in her job and seeking challenging work and is also happy if this involves moving to a new workplace or into a new position.

4.3.13. Anna, 30s, nursery teacher

First interview: July 2012

Follow-up interview: February 2013

4.3.13.1. Bio sketch

Anna works as nursery teacher in a special needs kindergarten. She quit the Gymnasium and finished, instead, a commercial school/college. Afterwards Anna did an apprenticeship as assistant tax accountant and worked, after completion, for one year in the job but mainly to earn some money to undergo another two years training as a nursery teacher (one year shorter as some community work Anna had been doing voluntarily was accredited as prior learning). She then worked for five years with the a faith-based youth association, then for four years in a kindergarten and was during the first interview since a couple of months with her current employer, which is a kindergarten for disturbed children and those in need of special education. Key experiences of transition for Anna have been the career change from tax consultant to nursery teacher, which was greatly supported by her parents.

Anna's narrative revolves around having always had temporary contracts, which are common in the educational field. Although with growing work experience Anna has become more confident in getting her contracts renewed, this element of insecurity still makes her feel uncomfortable.

Anna also mentioned during the first interview that she was pregnant and that she will go on maternity/parental leave in November 2012. Her employer has offered her another one year contract. Still, Anna is unsure how things will develop professionally in the future with her new family situation.

4.3.13.2. *Contextualisation*

Both interviews with Anna were conducted by telephone, the first one lasting 45 and the second one 35 minutes. Anna was quite open and communicative but did not engage in longer narrative passages in the first interview. Therefore, the interview was largely guided by questions. The second interview was more structured around narrative passages.

4.3.13.3. *Work biography*

Anna left the Gymnasium after grade 11 because she was tired of learning and wanted to do something more practical. She switched to a commercial school/college which she completed and thereafter started an apprenticeship as assistant tax accountant, which she completed after three years. She continued to work with the same employer for another year, but basically with the main intention to save some money to start training as a nursery teacher. The training lasted for two years and could be reduced by one year since some of the voluntary work Anna had been doing in the Church community was accredited as prior learning (i.e. the regular duration of training would have been three years). Her first job after completion of the training was with the catholic youth association where she worked as expert for educational issues (*Bildungsreferentin*) for five years. Anna then changed jobs to work as nursery teacher in a local kindergarten for the next 4.5 years before, most recently, having changed again to work at a nursery school specialised in working with disturbed children and those who are in need of special education and are in some cases also disabled.

Anna really likes her current work with children with special needs and is glad that she applied for it and changed jobs a couple of months ago (four months before the first interview was conducted). In her work, Anna plans and coordinates the day for the children including therapeutic sessions and special activities (horse riding, swimming, physiotherapy, etc.) and guides them through the day, which runs from 8.00 to 14.00 o'clock. Afterwards, when the children have been picked up, Anna has to do administrative and coordinating tasks to prepare for the next day, the following week or special upcoming events.

4.3.13.4. *Transitions*

Transition from tax assistant to nursery teacher

The transition from tax assistant to nursery teacher is what Anna perceives as the most important or radical one in her life. She says: 'Well, I think it was the year when I finished my apprenticeship as tax assistant, when I fairly clearly realised that this was not what I wanted to be doing forever. It was clear, right on the day when I took the final examinations, yes, when I got the results, this was when I was sure 'no, this I don't want to be doing' and that I wanted to change to a completely different area of work. And it was very clear also that this was in the educational/preschool field. Yes, I would say that this was, if I do a quick recapitulation, this was the most decisive moment of my transitions.'

Asked about how this career change came about Anna says: 'Well, it actually happened when I was visiting the commercial school/college. I went to a career counsellor and based on my interest in the pedagogical field, working with children was indeed the right thing. But at that time it was also important for me to learn something that would not just be a school-based training, but where I could also gain some work experience and also earn some money.'

So, while the new career pathway was in a way clear to Anna already while she went to the commercial college, making her be sure of which direction to take and also having this confirmed by a professional career counsellor, other considerations made Anna decide to complete an apprenticeship first. One could argue that Anna wanted to satisfy other needs, having an income and gaining work experience and also develop some job and employment security since tax assistant in Germany is a profile in demand and with good career prospects. Ultimately, Anna built her professional route on two pillars to enhance her overall job and employment security. Anna chose the tax assistant apprenticeship because from her skills profile accountancy was undoubtedly the right direction to take. And although already after the first year Anna knew that she did not want to work in this job for long, she completed the apprenticeship, also to demonstrate that she could do it despite most of her friends and family thinking that she would not make it. It was a process of demonstrating her skills to others and gaining self-confidence. Another reason why Anna decided against a school-based vocational training was that at that age (or point in time) she was not really enthusiastic about learning. In fact, she was not interested in school-based learning and much more engaged in Church activities, being involved in youth work, organising youth camps and trips, etc. Continuously engaging in these activities, in the end, was more compatible with doing an apprenticeship than a school-based training.

Moving into preschool education and undergoing another training programme to become a nursery teacher was very much supported by Anna's

parents. Furthermore, friends and other family members also encouraged her to redirect her career. Financially Anna lived from her savings and continued to work as tax assistant alongside going to the vocational school. In addition, she received public funding support (*Bafög*) starting from her second training year.

Changing employers: from working for the Church to nursery teacher

Anna liked her job as educational advisor (*Bildungsreferentin*) with the catholic youth association where she worked for five years. The job was challenging and diverse in terms of tasks and activities. The main reasons why Anna wanted to leave this job were working conditions and, in particular, working hours as her work required highly flexible working hours, including working in the evenings and on week-ends plus working overtime and extra hours. Ultimately Anna realised that this had a negative impact on her friendships and social networks, e.g. often when she was invited in the evenings by friends she had to work. Looking back Anna says that these were nice and interesting five years, but that after these years she wanted a job with regular working hours. Another reason for leaving was that actually the employer wanted to have a social pedagogue in this position so that for Anna getting the job was connected to the employer's expectation that Anna would obtain the respective certificate. This, however, would have meant for her to study social pedagogy. While initially she considered following this route would be interesting, she felt differently about it about one year later and decided that actually she did not want to engage in further studies. Finally, at some point Anna also felt too old for working in a youth association (where 'the youngsters are becoming younger and younger') or rather she wanted to give room for younger qualified colleagues to take her place. Thus, Anna rejected the possibility to renew her contract for another two years and fairly smoothly found a new job in a kindergarten almost instantly upon termination of her contract.

From nursery teacher into special education

After having worked for the youth association Anna started as nursery teacher in a local kindergarten for 4.5 years. The move into working with children with special needs was not really planned, but was a coincidence initiated by a friend (with whom Anna did her vocational training), who pointed Anna to a vacancy at her current employer. The friends encouraged her to apply saying 'this will be the right job for you'. Anna then started to consider this move and thought this to be an interesting opportunity that would allow her to expand on her skills and to experience a different kind of work, new fields of activities and, ultimately, a higher intensity in the interaction with the children. Anna thought 'if I don't apply now I am not sure that I will do it again in four years time or so'. She also thought that maybe it would not be a good timing to change employers because she was

planning to build her own family. However, knowing that having a baby cannot really be planned and also having some kind of competitive ambitions Anna applied and got the job.

Future transition: maternity leave/returning to work

When the first interview was conducted Anna was pregnant and planning to go on maternity leave in November 2012. The planned family arrangement was that Anna would return to work fairly quickly, i.e. taking two months maternity leave and another two months parental leave after having given birth and then return to work. Ideally, her husband would then take the remaining parental leave or at least stay home with the baby for some time. However, Anna stated that she cannot really plan her working life after she will have had the baby and was saying that she would wait how things develop. From the employer she was offered another one year contract to continue after her parental leave.

4.3.13.5. Emerging themes

Temporary contracts/employment insecurity

Anna stated that in the field of preschool education temporary employment contracts are the rule and that she always has had one year contracts, which were being renewed. With employees being mainly young females there is a high level of staff fluctuation, which is partly mirrored in temporary contracts (e.g. temporary replacements for women who are on maternity leave). This generates employment instability, which Anna was concerned about. This situation created a feeling of ambiguity, i.e. insecurity and concerns on the one hand, which, however, also combine with optimism and positive thinking. To the question whether Anna feels uncomfortable about this situation she answered: 'Well, in the meantime yes, because you constantly have to, with my former employer it was common that every year in April I had to register as unemployed and had to fill out all the papers over and over again. And each time it was uncertain whether they would keep me over the summer or whether I'd have to leave. [...] Usually I got some positive feed-back in time, 'ok, we do have enough children this year, it looks good'. But feelings of discomfort and concerns remain. Although for some parts I am also relaxed about it, because I believe that somehow I'll always find a new job.'

Anna believes that with growing work experience it will also become easier for her to find a new job.

Learning from transitions

Retrospectively Anna thinks that her career pathway makes sense and that there is no change or transition or move that she regrets. At some point Anna regretted that she did not complete the *Abitur*, but this feeling has now vanished since she

thinks that professionally she has been on the right track. Ultimately, every stage of her career has enriched her with skills and experiences and something she could learn from. She would not have liked to have missed any of these experiences.

4.3.13.6. *Learning*

Anna recognises that much of the core skills she needs in her current job (such as patience, flexibility, empathy, creativity) forms part of her personality and developed in her childhood through her parents, but also through her engagement as a volunteer in Church and youth activities, where she also learnt to assume responsibility.

From her trajectory Anna has mostly learnt from changing jobs through gaining experience and being confronted with new tasks and challenges. She likes learning from and through practice and practical work and is not so much into formal learning although in her current job engaging in further training is expected and supported by the employer. Seminars and courses that run for two to three days are the most common format. For Anna it is important that these courses or seminars are directly connected to her work practice and her every day tasks. Thus, learning is evaluated against its practical value at work. The next important step is reflecting with colleagues and in the team about what has been learnt and how it is put into practice. In Anna's view the connection between theory and practice was obvious and well transmitted when she trained as nursery teacher, but less so during the tax assistant apprenticeship.

4.3.13.7. *Follow-up interview (February 2013)*

Main development: Anna continued with her former job until going on maternity leave. About three weeks ago she has had the baby. While the employer has indicated an interest to renew Anna's contract she will not be able to go back to her former workplace. When, where and if she will return to work is unsure.

(a) Theme 1: learning at the workplace

The last half year before Anna went on maternity leave has provided her with a new, enriching and intensive learning experience. Anna works with a group of eight children in a team of core staff (trainee and another nursery teacher) plus different specialists involving a physiotherapist, a speech therapist, a psychologist and an occupational therapist. In the institution where she works there are only two groups of eight children each and the specialists work in both groups and with both teams. By working in this kind of team arrangement Anna is experiencing significant learning-on-the-job through exchange and group reflection. This is for Anna a new learning experience that complements some other formal trainings and specialisations she did before she started at her new workplace. One

example of such formal specialisations has been a one-year course (running once every week) on Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Overall, the whole area of working with special needs children is still new for Anna and requires complex learning and understanding. Compared to her former work situations it is a very intensive learning environment, partly due to the institution being small, which provides for an intensive exchange and teacher-child relationship.

In the beginning it took about three months before teams and specialists could work smoothly together and got a good cooperation going. This was a key challenge for Anna.

(b) Theme 2: possibilities for returning to work

When the follow-up interview was conducted, Anna had just had her baby three weeks ago and has been on maternity leave for about seven weeks. What was clear when she left her job was that while she might be taken on after the parental leave by the employer, she will not be able to go back to her former workplace, the key reason being that she had replaced somebody who had been on maternity leave and this colleague has now returned. Her former contract was to end in a few weeks time. Thus Anna was not sure that she can continue where she worked before. The chances are good that she can continue with the employer, but she may be assigned to a different post, which may as well be only part-time. And if it is in a regular nursery or day-care/crèche then she would earn less than in the specialised area where she worked before.

Anna feels being thrown back to the very familiar instable and insecure employment situation. This new situation also has major consequences for her family situation as she had planned to share the parental leave with her husband. It was planned that Anna would quickly return to work after a few weeks and her husband would then take parental leave for some time. Now that it is not sure when and where and under which conditions Anna can return, her husband will rather stick to his full-time employment since he is the main earner. This in turn will mean that for some time Anna will not be able to go back to work full-time. On the other hand, if she can only do part-time this in turn will limit her job opportunities. Ultimately, the situation is completely open for her. She also admits that she cannot really foresee how much she will actually be able to work with the baby at home. And during the interview Anna confirmed several times that if it does not work out to combine working and having a baby, then this would be equally fine. She just has to see how things will develop. However, she was also very eager to go back to work. At least the employer has confirmed that they wanted to employ her again. This gives her some kind of confidence, but the ambiguous feelings remain.

4.3.14. Barbara, 40s, nursery teacher now working in special needs education

First interview: June 2012

Follow-up interview: January 2013

4.3.14.1. Bio sketch

Barbara is divorced and a single mother with two children. She schooled in the former East and trained there as nursery teacher/child care provider, which back in the DDR was a higher education training programme. It was the year of the reunification (1989) when Barbara finished her training and took the opportunity to look for work in the West (but continued to live in her home town in the border area for another couple of years). Alongside her first job in a kindergarten she also did the six-month conversion course to obtain the equivalent West-German certificate as educator/nursery teacher. After three years in the kindergarten Barbara started looking for a new professional challenge and switched to work in a hotel, first cleaning and then at the reception. After about two years Barbara moved to live with her partner and found a new job in her former profession working for an orphanage. After one year Barbara quit because she found shift work too stressful and also realised that the orphanage was not for her. She thus looked for another job and has now been working with an institution caring for children with special needs since 15 years. Due to her child care responsibilities she has been working part-time (29 hours per week).

A major transition period for Barbara has been the reunification with career considerations becoming much less important than other areas of life. The narrative also revolves around being the breadwinner but also looking for challenging work. Barbara stresses that working with special needs children provides her with sufficient challenges in her job and that this is something she likes very much.

4.3.14.2. Contextualisation

Both interviews were conducted by telephone, the first one lasting 40 and the second one 30 minutes.

4.3.14.3. Work biography

Personal and family reasons combined with the political situation back in the former East prevented Barbara from following the professional route she initially would have liked to follow. Back in school she wanted to become a teacher but could not finish with the *Abitur* due to family circumstances. Teaching (and medicine as an alternative) as well had a certain political connotation she could not comply with. Sticking to the wish of working with children Barbara then decided to train as nursery teacher, which in the former East was at the

equivalent qualification level with general teaching, but less politically framed. After obtaining the certificate Barbara had the intent to study. However, the reunification made her decide to start working in her profession as nursery teacher and she immediately got a job in a small kindergarten in the country side. She completed the six-month conversion course to obtain the equivalent West-German certificate as nursery teacher ('state examination as nursery teacher'). This qualification was in form of a further training programme one day per week alongside her regular job. In Barbara's view this was just a formality where she did not learn anything. In fact, in her view the training in the former East was at a higher level and of better quality than the nursery teacher training in (west) Germany that is still in practice today.

4.3.14.4. *Transitions*

First transition: from nursery teacher to hotel management

After three years working as nursery teacher Barbara felt under-challenged and started to explore a new professional direction, moving into hotel management. This was a fairly smooth transition until family demands and a personal conflict with her supervisor made her abandon this career direction to start anew in another city in her old job. It could be regarded as trying out something new and completely different, which, however, did not turn out to be the 'right' thing for Barbara to do on a more long-term basis. Main issues were shift work, high work pressure and high level of flexibility demands when working in hotel management.

Second transition: from hotel management to orphanage

With moving to another city Barbara sought to find a job related to the field she trained in and was employed at an orphanage to take care of children with learning and behavioural disorders in an assisted living arrangement. After one year Barbara decided that this type of social work, being seen as a mother by the orphans in addition to shift work and particularly long shifts of 24 hours non-stop, did not work for her so that she tried to find something else.

Third transition: from orphanage to nursery for children with special needs

For 16 years Barbara has now been working with a nursery school as special needs educator. The field of therapeutic education for small children is sufficiently challenging for Barbara in her daily work and also makes her connect well to her basic training as nursery teacher. She considers that every special needs incident is particular and therefore she encounters very little routine in her job. In this fairly long period with her current employer Barbara had had two children of her own and two periods of longer maternity leave, but in both cases returned to the same employer. With working in special needs education Barbara has found

her professional fulfilment. Thus, this third transition has been particularly meaningful for her. For the future Barbara sees herself remaining in her current area of work but also sees herself 'moving on' in terms of advancing in her skills and becoming more specialised.

4.3.14.5. *Emerging themes*

Restricted career options

The narrative revolves around prevented career chances due to different circumstances (family situation, political situation, financial restrictions) which Barbara is tracing back to the very initial school years. Just before the reunification Barbara had envisioned to study either child psychology or special needs education, but gave up this idea attracted by the possibility to just get a job, earn some money and enjoy the new freedom and possibilities of a self-determined life.

'It would have been possible (to study), yes. But then we had the reunification. And I was young and nobody knew what would come next. We were all lost in a way, not knowing which way to take at the age of 19 and I just wanted to live, I wanted to live that freedom. I wanted to be free. And then I just got a job, mainly also because I wanted to earn the money from the West I had been longing for so so long (laughing). And then I started in my profession as a nursery teacher. I immediately got a job.'

Looking for a new challenge

After three years working as nursery teacher Barbara felt under-challenged and started to explore new directions. Initially she engaged in dancing at a semi-professional level but also kept her regular job. She then thought to redirect her career and try out something different and switched to work in a hotel, first cleaning and then at the reception to become the reception manager. Alongside she was pursuing a training programme in hotel management. Finally, Barbara abandoned this career direction altogether due to personal and family reasons, followed her partner to another city in northern Germany and applied to get back into her old job.

Learning from transitions

The most decisive period of transition for Barbara has been the reunification that opened up not only new career opportunities but also the chance for a completely new way of life and political freedom. In this moment, she later had a much higher value than any form of progressive career planning or a narrow focus on obtaining a specific qualification. The professional life in this radical transition was secondary. Barbara has learnt to look for new ways when she feels dissatisfied with her work and initiate a change.

4.3.14.6. *Learning*

The third transition in particular has made Barbara to engage in a lot of further learning and training related to special needs and therapeutic education. One reason is that this did not form part of Barbara's basic training. However, it is also an area Barbara is particularly interested in (such as severely handicapped children and autism) and she reads a lot of expert books at home to broaden her knowledge on this subject and has also followed some further training courses. Self-directed learning is the most important form of learning for Barbara and most of the skills and knowledge she is using and applying today has been through self-directed learning. She is very eager to advance her knowledge and skills in this area but at the moment there are financial and family restrictions to engage in significant further training (in terms of time and resources).

In addition, she learns a lot in the interaction with colleagues. Learning with and from colleagues had been very important during the first 10 years with her current employer. In the last five years Barbara has been working with very difficult colleagues. This she finds extremely exhausting and difficult.

4.3.14.7. *Follow-up interview (January 2013)*

Main development: Significant engagement with learning to enhance own personal development and diversify career possibilities could not be realised. This was experienced as a major drawback. Work situation in terms of interpersonal conflicts at work has improved.

(a) Theme 1: professional development

Since the first interview, Barbara had applied for a major four-year formal training course on autism at the university as a key step first, to shape her career into a specific direction, and second, to become more independent in terms of future career prospects. Participating in this course and getting the certificate was very important for her, also because it was one of the few courses that she could manage to participate from the aspect of time management and her financial resources. For her as a single mother the options are limited due to constraints in terms of time flexibility. The course to specialise in autism would have been one of the few courses she would actually have been able to follow. However, Barbara was rejected to participate in the course, partly because the course was full but also, and this is what Barbara thinks, because the course organisers accepted in the first place social pedagogues and social workers but not nursery teachers.

Barbara was totally disappointed and disillusioned so that not being able to take part in this course somehow induced a period of personal crisis. For her this course had a key motivational element related to increasing her engagement with work and support her in her work practice. She said that not getting accepted to this course resulted in a little breakdown as it would

also have provided for a specialisation in autism, which could serve as a second pillar professionally in the case that Barbara wanted to provide casework for autistic children and thus work more independently. Gradually Barbara revealed that in fact she regarded this particular courses as to provide a new opening to her future professional development, supporting on the one hand her current work but also to open up new alternatives. As the course is offered only every two years and lasts for four years, Barbara was not sure that she would apply again in two years time: 'I will be 44 by then and I can't say what will the situation in two years time. And also, the course lasts for four years [...]'.

Barbara took it very personally that she was rejected to participate in this course. She emphasised several times that she not only works with autistic children every day, but that she has also already done some other training focusing on this area so that she has experience in terms of theory and practice in this field. The experience of not having been accepted was also particularly bitter as a younger less experience colleague was accepted to the course.

'And although this wasn't required in the application I specifically described my particular positive engagement with autistic children in my work and that I also already did some specialised trainings on it in (name of city). I think this was two years ago. And it was because of this training that I benefitted so much in my work practice and, well, I actually learn through practical work and thus I have so much experience in this area of specialisation. And now I have a colleague who was accepted to the course and who does not have a background in preschool education but in early childhood intervention, but who definitely does not work with autistic children as intensively as I do. And when I see, well, this may sound stupid, but I simply have much more practical experience than she does. And also I had all this positive experience with autism, which she did not have. And now I have to instruct her. And this, of course, is totally frustrating for me. And she will have the certificate in four years time, but actually it is me who is in practice doing the work and it is me who in the first place is supporting the achievements, but she in the end will have the certificate. And this is just because she has another background qualification than me.'

As an alternative, Barbara has now applied for some other courses focusing on other areas, but which are second best. On the one hand, there is some pressure from her work context to keep up to date but and engage with continuing learning. On the other hand, Barbara also wants to do these courses for herself and to enhance her professional development opportunities. Ultimately, all courses currently available are second best as in fact Barbara would prefer to do an in-depth further training that leads to a

formal certificate. However, she has not found a course suitable for her situation and that she can also afford. She also would have been insisting and following up more on the issue of having been rejected to participate, but since they also had a death in the family she did not have the energy to struggle (Barbara stated several times that this was a severe personal loss and emotionally wearing for her, but did not further specify the concrete circumstances).

(b) Theme 2: the work team/interaction with colleagues

During the first interview dissatisfaction with the team work and problems within the team emerged as a dominant theme. At some point Barbara had even requested to be assigned to another team. This, however, did not materialise, but some staff has been replaced in the meantime so that the team atmosphere has improved. The composition of the team members has also induced a significant learning experience as Barbara is now almost the oldest in the team among a larger number of young colleagues. Barbara sees herself in this situation as a role model, exercising good practices in everyday work. This is a new situation for Barbara that makes her learn a lot in terms of interpersonal exchange, communication and mutual learning. In her position as experienced colleague she also gets a lot of recognition from her younger colleagues, which makes her feel more self-confident and happy. It also impacts on her work satisfaction, which, in turn, is reflected positively in her family situation. From this interpersonal learning experience at work Barbara feels to be more open towards her sons and recognises that also in the family the communication structures have improved. This openness also translates into a higher degree of flexibility and more energy to meet friends and engage with social activities. As compared to a situation of permanent conflict at work, which was the case when the first interview was conducted, Barbara's social interaction in her private life has also improved. She said that when there is so much pressure and conflict at work, she also does not find it easy to meet friends and just have good time together.

(c) Theme 3: balancing work and family commitments

Barbara is a single mother with two sons who, since the first interview, are now together in the same secondary school, which makes the logistics easier. They also have long school days and that makes it easier for Barbara to work some longer days. She says that over the years she has learnt a lot in terms of time management and organisation, juggling the different work and family demands. What she also states is that she did not feel supported in any way as a single mother, not practically and also not financially. Particularly when the children were small and she could only work half days her income combined with the public support was not enough to sustain the

family. However, staying home was never an option for Barbara. She describes herself as ambitious and always wanting more than just the routine, but also always wanted to explore and learn new things. Barbara regards being curious and eager to learn as forming part of her personality.

4.3.15. Anke, 44 years, injobber (German activation programme to get unemployed into the labour market)

Anke is an iconic case and details of her career are given in Section 5.5 of the main report.

4.3.16. Fatma, 40s, multiple occupations

4.3.16.1. Bio sketch

Fatma came from Turkey to Germany with her parents when she was a school child. She had to repeat two classes due to language barriers and graduated at the age of 18 from *Hauptschule* to then undergo a three years training as furrier. She worked in this profession until having her first child. Then she worked as a seamstress for two years before having twins. Fatma then went into translations, working as a translator for public institutions (e.g. at the court), achieving a translation certificate alongside working. She very successfully worked as a translator for about 14 years with short periods of interruptions. As the translation work involved a lot of travelling, Fatma wanted to change her career and do something else. After a one year orientation phase and an internship in an elderly care institution Fatma decided to undergo another three years training programme as elderly care nurse which she completed in 2008. Since then she has been working in this profession. The last training period from 2005 to 2008 has been especially demanding and challenging, particularly in terms of learning demands.

Fatma's career narrative revolves around accommodating a strong work orientation with family commitments and traditional role models. Fatma always went back to work soon after maternity leave, always finding herself in a new job. The redirections of her career always involved a high commitment to learning and training on the job. That she could realise her working life despite her family responsibilities has been possible through the support of her family (her mother, brother and husband).

4.3.16.2. Contextualisation

Fatma was recruited through one of my students, who is of Turkish origin. She represents an exceptional female career for Turkish immigrants of the first generation. Fatma lives in a medium size town at the Bavarian border and was

very open to tell about her personal experience. Her German is fluent with a Bavarian accent. The interview was conducted by telephone and lasted one hour.

4.3.16.3. *Work biography*

Fatma came from Turkey to Germany with her parents at the age of 10 and after having completed five school years in Turkey. Due to language barriers she had to repeat two classes, which Fatma found difficult as she and her brother were the only Turkish pupil in the class and two years older than their classmates. Her father insisted that Fatma should commit to learning German to facilitate the integration process. Overall, Fatma found the integration and assimilation process difficult, but graduated from *Hauptschule* at the age of 18. It was again Fatma's father who insisted that she must learn a trade and should not go to work in the factory as unskilled labourer. She found an apprenticeship to train as furrier by going round from one business to the next and ultimately through personal networks. Subsequently Fatma also worked there for another two years until she had her first baby and the business eventually had to close down. This first work experience during the apprenticeship and afterwards has been very good because the boss was also a mentor and treated Fatma like his own daughter and showed her all the required skills. Also for Fatma the practical learning was a much better experience than learning at school.

4.3.16.4. *Transitions*

First transition: from furrier to seamstress

After having had her first child and a period of maternity leave Fatma left her son with her mother and started looking for a new job since her former employer had closed down his business. She found new work as a seamstress where she could build on her former skills but also had to develop new skills that were trained on the job. Fatma worked in this job for two years until having twins, which made her stay home for three to four years.

Second transition: from seamstress to translator

When Fatma re-entered the labour market after having stayed home with her children for some time she was again redirecting her career and looked for a new job. Her twins were in kindergarten then and her older son started schooling. Fatma started working for a translation service, the first six months working alongside a certified translator to then do a certificate which would allow her to work on her own. Fatma then was mainly working for public institutions such as the court or the State Office of Criminal Investigation. This new job required totally different skills, a high level of self-confidence and being able to take responsibility. For Fatma it was a new world and a very exciting job. Since the job

also required a high level of mobility Fatma relied on her family support structures, help from her mother, brother and husband in particular.

Third transition: from translator to elderly care nurse

After having worked for about 14 years in translation services Fatma decided to redirect her career, mainly because of the working hours and the high level of mobility her job involved since she was providing services regionally in the neighbouring Federal States, too. She would often come home at 10:00 p.m or later and had to work extra and irregular hours. Fatma felt that this was unhealthy for her family life and decided to look for something else. This was a fairly difficult decision and took some time and Fatma spent about one year of career orientation reflecting about future possible professional directions. She did not want an office job but interacting with people. She did not want to work on a machine but to have a responsible, interesting job where empathy and communication skills would be required.

It was through friends and personal contacts that the idea of going into elderly care came up. Then Fatma gathered information and was much more serious about taking the 'right' decision, being aware that this might be the last time of redirecting her career. To become more assured of taking the right track Fatma decided to do a four-week internship at an elderly care institution to find out whether she liked the job. She then applied for an apprenticeship and got a placement in the same institution where she had done the intership. The training itself was very exhaustive and involved high learning demands and several times Fatma asked herself several times whether this had been the right decision, with three teenage children at home. But somehow they all learnt together and shared, in a way, this intensive learning period. Overall, Fatma says that this situation, the high learning demands and the exams, was much more demanding and stressful than when Fatma had been working full-time as translator. Pressure increased because Fatma was very ambitious, aiming for good examination results. The learning also was very demanding in terms of the theoretical knowledge which Fatma partly felt was too remote from work practice.

After Fatma had successfully completed her training she was taken on by the institution as employee, but received a temporary work contract of only six years based on the fact that she was a Muslim but worked for a protestant care institution (the requirement of church-based care institutions in Germany normally is that you need to be a member of the religious group). Thus, compared to her protestant colleagues, who have permanent contracts, Fatma became a temporary employee which, however, she knew before that these were the conditions. Despite these limitations Fatma soon moved into a team leading position which she has now been holding for one year. She sees this as a recognition and reassurance of her skills and work commitment. If her contract

will not be renewed, Fatma sees no problem in finding another employer. She already had another job offer, but decided to remain with her current employer after the institution asked her or begged her to stay.

In the team leading position Fatma oversees and has responsibility for 40 patients and about 10-15 staff. She states that this is a challenge and it took some time until she was accepted by colleagues and patients. The reservation was partly because of Fatma's Turkish background – since she is the only Turkish employee in the institution.

Most important transitions

The two most important transitions for Fatma have been the first one, to train as a furrier and to have found and organised this apprenticeship all by herself. This was important because with this move Fatma could meet the expectations of her parents, i.e. learn a trade. And she was very proud that she managed to have secured getting a professional training all by herself. Today Fatma very much appreciates this attitude of her parents, who insisted in getting a qualification although they did not have much knowledge about the German labour market. Her parents were also illiterate and could not help her in school. This means Fatma had to become independent at a very young age, sometimes even managing formalities for her parents who did not speak as good German like she did. The second important transition was to become an elderly care nurse, mainly because it presented a radical career change, which involved exerting great efforts at an advanced age.

Looking back at her professional life Fatma is most dissatisfied with having remained in the translation job for such a long time despite the fact that it was very stressful and stretched the family situation for a considerable period of time. The work itself also required a lot of commitment. In Fatma's view she also says that overall the translation was also more heavily based on theoretical knowledge, whereas today Fatma knows that she is a much more practical and hands-on person.

4.3.16.5. Emerging themes

High expectations

Fatma always had very high learning and performance expectations, which, on the one hand, pushed her to move on and go through a series of career redirections, but which also put high pressure on her. Today she thinks that this pressure and high performance expectations were also difficult for her family sometimes and that she wished she could sometimes be more relaxed and less ambitious.

Support structures

Fatma reverted to a strong support structure from her family on which she could always rely upon to 100%. For her the family is the most important resource and support, whereas all other kinds of formal or institutional support (e.g. from the school or the employer) needs to be requested and demanded but cannot be taken for granted. Fatma in this respect has always been fairly self-confident and straight forward to seek to talk openly about her needs, interests and the support she required.

Discrimination

Fatma states that she always had to struggle to get accepted by peers and colleagues and that this has sometimes been offending and difficult. For example, at her current workplace she is the only Turkish employee and when in the beginning her colleagues could not pronounce her name they used to call her 'the Turkish woman', which Fatma felt offended about. She would then try to talk to her colleagues openly about it. However, it would always be her who takes the initiative and to confront a conflicting or discriminating situation. This direct approach, however, helped her to be accepted in the end. Fatma says that as a Turkish she always needs to prove harder than others that she is good, that she performs well at work. She has to work harder, needs to perform better, be more polite, be more attentive, etc., than her German colleagues to be accepted and respected. Fatma feels this to be a constant struggle, but she gets rewarded in the end and that she then is even more proud of getting recognition for her work.

4.3.16.6. Learning

Fatma's career redirections were based on significant engagement with formal and informal learning. Ultimately, each occupation (furrier, seamstress, translator, elderly care nurse) required a formal training and qualification and altogether Fatma spent about seven years of formal learning plus probably another one to two years of intensive training on the job. Her most difficult and demanding learning period has been undergoing the retraining to become elderly care nurse when she was already 40 years. The three-year training was based on a lot of theoretical knowledge and high learning requirements. The engagement with learning required also stretched Fatma's family situation and overall Fatma said that the learning was more stressful as compared to the time when she was working full-time as translator. Fatma also was partly disappointed that the theoretical knowledge she learnt was quite remote from work practice. And when Fatma was trying to transfer some of the theoretical stuff she had learnt to her work practice she was stopped being told that theory and practice are two different things. However, Fatma could apply almost all of the medical and legal aspects of the theoretical knowledge she acquired directly to practice, whereas

most of the knowledge around caring and care provision were not really applicable, often due to work and time constraints. Working in the framework of such restrictions Fatma finds very frustrating and this has a negative impact on her work satisfaction.

Further training courses are offered by Fatma's employer, but not for temporary employees. In this way Fatma is discriminated against in a double way: because she is a Muslim she is not entitled to a permanent contract, but is employed on the basis of a temporary contract. And since she is not permanent, she cannot take advantage of further training courses offered by her employer. Concretely, Fatma would like to pursue the formal qualification as team leader, but this qualification confines employees to stay with the employer for three years (since the employer is paying for the training) and in the case of a temporary contract a commitment over four to five years is not possible. This results in a multiple contradiction. As Fatma says: 'the employer wants to keep me, but they are not ready to invest. And they give me responsibilities and a responsible position, which, however, they do not support through further training'. This presents a difficult situation to Fatma. However, for her it is most important that she is doing a good job and that everything in her unit is working well. This gives her self-confidence and from being sure that she performs well derives her work satisfaction. It shows her that she is on the right track and she is quite sure that she will move on and advance further in her career. Completing the qualification as team or unit leader is the only learning pathway Fatma would still like to pursue. Besides, there are no more learning interests, but also Fatma is in a way tired of learning.

Asked about how she learns best Fatma stated that she best learns by herself, partly through reading but also through exploring and looking up topics and issues. She does not like to engage in group learning but prefers a self-directed, independent approach.

4.3.17. Karin, 40s, prop master

4.3.17.1. Bio sketch

Karin left secondary school without a certificate to work with children for one year, but then decided to go back to school and complete the *Fachabitur* specialising in textiles. She then entered the *Fachhochschule* trying out different course combinations (education, textiles, sports, German language) and worked in parallel in different jobs. After four years Karin quit her studies, moved to another town, joined a programme to train as midwife, but quit after three months because she became pregnant. She then stayed home with the kids for the following eight years. To get back into work Karin visited a vocational orientation seminar and was finally placed to work with a restorer in a museum and did this

for 1.5 years before moving through private contacts to do an internship at the theatre working as prop master. During this time Karin continued to receive the unemployment benefit, but then took different temporary jobs in this field until in 2005 she started to work as a freelancer. With prop mastery being registered as a crafts business (but not being regulated as a *Beruf*), Karin got a title from the chamber of crafts and permission to work as a freelancer. Then, in 2007, she got a 60% permanent position at the local theatre where she still works.

The narrative revolves around being in search of what to do professionally and trying out different things, not to make a career, but to combine work with self-fulfilment.

4.3.17.2. *Contextualisation*

The interview with Karin was highly reflective and thoughtful and in this way easy to conduct. Karin used very vivid pictures and paraphrasing to express herself. The interview lasted for 60 minutes.

4.3.17.3. *Work biography*

Karin quit general schooling after Grade 11 to do a one-year internship working with children in a day care centre. She then decided to go back to school to complete the *Fachabitur* specialising in textiles and clothing. Initially Karin thought she wanted to specialise in education but after the internship wanted to change direction and chose textile and clothing as an alternative. After completion of the *Fachabitur* Karin did one year at the *Fachhochschule* for social work not with the intention to do this as a career, but mainly to obtain a university entry qualification. The university courses she took were geared towards becoming a teacher and Karin tried out different subjects, starting with textiles and German language and then shifting to sports. As a student Karin also had different jobs in a bar and also at a local radio station. After four years Karin quit her studies, searching what she wanted to do professionally. Also from her practical work experiences thus far no concrete idea for her career pathway had derived. Then Karin applied for a training course in midwifery and was accepted in another major city to where she moved. However, a few weeks after the course had started Karin realised that she was pregnant so that she stopped the training programme to move back to the former city and start a family with her partner. In the following eight years Karin stayed home as a housewife taking care of her two children. During that time Karin completed a private course over 1.5 years to train as prenatal assistant (*Geburtsvorbereiterin*), but could never practice in this profession because it was made redundant and did not receive any further public support after Karin had finished the course (due to rationalisation of health care provisions).

At some point Karin started to do a psychotherapy (or psycho analysis) and visited a career orientation seminar which helped Karin to identify her strength and real interests. These went into the direction of model maker in a museum and since Karin still got support and benefits from the unemployment agency she could do a temporary job at a museum where she worked for 1.5 years side by side with a prop master. In this job Karin worked 50% in the mornings. The precise work and skills required to build models for the museum were very fascinating for Karin, but the atmosphere and long-term direction of particular projects did not go in line with Karin's expectations. A colleague thus advised her to try out working at the theatre and through personal contacts and a friend Karin got an internship at the theatre, initially for four weeks to find out whether this could be a possible career path for the future.

At the theatre Karin was almost immediately offered a part-time job, still with complementary unemployment benefits. As initially she could not become permanent at the theatre Karin decided to work as a freelance prop master on project-based arrangements, which worked very well for a couple of years. The prerequisite was to get a title or licence as prop master issued by the Chamber of Crafts, which she obtained based on her previous jobs and work practice. During these years Karin was in parallel working as decorator and involved in other jobs at her husband's business which was a bicycle (work)shop. The decorator activities had been ultimately very helpful to get the title.

4.3.17.4. *Transitions*

Karin started and quit different career pathways and options along the way, always being in search of what she wanted to be doing professionally. In her own words and view, however, she said that she did not quit, but that things developed along the way and that she gave up doing something to start something new. So, for her it is more the perception of things being adjusted over time, moving into different directions but in her view in form of a continuous flow rather than being felt as disruptions and discontinuous experiences. For the narrative this is a very important underpinning because it generates a different meaning of 'transitions'.

A major redirection, as Karin pointed out, was the career orientation seminar by John Webb which brought about a radical change and a totally new approach to her own professional life. It made her think in another direction, from 'this is what I could do' to 'this is what I want to be doing'. The first direction opens up a whole range of possible career pathways based on various interests, but also always left Karin unsure about whether she had chosen the right track and made her feel that maybe she should try something else. The second direction, by contrast, made her being absolutely sure about who she is, what her skills are and what she really wants to be doing professionally. And pursuing this only one

direction has finally made her becoming a prop master and feeling 100% sure that this has been the right track and this is where she wants to be. And this determination did not give her the feeling of being inflexible but rather let her see herself in all her facets and on the route towards self-realisation and a deep satisfaction. This insight and security gave her the courage to take risks to follow her professional route.

Support from and exchanges with friends made her go to this specific seminar of career orientation.

Change of responsibility

One transition Karin brought up in the interview was the change from working at the theatre during her internship and on project-based contracts while she was freelancing and now being a regular employee. She thought that the regular employment would also change her approach towards her work, in particular that she would feel a higher level of responsibility towards her work, but she recognises that in reality this has not been the case and that the framework of the employment contract ultimately did not make a difference to her.

Former transitions

Reflecting about her initial career pathways as midwife and midwifery assistant, which she abandoned, Karin states that this was part of her journey which is perfectly integrated into her life and work biography and not conceived as a disruption. Today she is realising that the kind of responsibility as a midwife would have been too overwhelming for her and also that the hospital environment would not have matched her personality and approach towards the profession. However, in terms of skills, the learning experience and the processes involved Karin has benefitted a lot, personally e.g. when giving birth herself and as being a mother, but also Karin can bridge and transfer some of the experience from the midwifery programme into her current job.

Future expectations

Karin is expecting a major change and new orientation in her job when a new theatre manager will take his job in the near future and a new performance is being put together. This will involve new actors and colleagues and since Karin's job involves interacting with all these different people and developing an understanding of working together this always involves great adaptation for her. Her work environment is very dynamic and constantly changing. However, in terms of the tasks Karin is performing she does not foresee any major changes. One consideration she has is that the new manager might request that she should work more hours due to work intensification, and while Karin would like to work a bit more (she currently works 24 hours per week), Karin is also very

definite about not wanting to work full-time. The main reason is that this would be too exhaustive, in particular because Karin does a lot of shift work and needs to have time to recover. But work-life balance and having time for her family are also issues of concern. In addition, Karin may be considering doing other things and maybe professionally also developing a second complementary track to what she is doing at the moment.

To the question whether Karin would like to work more hours

'I am thinking about it, I am indecisive. The shift work alone, and I am also not becoming younger, I notice that, because we are five people and we always have to be up-to-date and this is really exhaustive. This would, of course, become more of a routine if I was there more hours. I would not have all the time this 'get me up-to-date'. Just by being there I would know what is going on. But I am not sure. In fact there are also other things I'd like to do and I am thinking whether I should not build up a second pillar professionally and I am not sure that this would be at the theatre. Because there is one area where I feel under-challenged in my work and this is the creative part or, more precisely, the crafts part. My job really involves a lot of communication, doing something for others and it is also a lot of cleaning and organisation. And really concentrating on the crafts-based work and, above all, working according to my own standards, this is not always possible at the theatre. And I know that I won't get it there. Because the theatre is too big and this going into detail, what I love so much, this I need to find somewhere else. [...] But the question is also whether this second pillar needs to be realised at the professional level at all or whether I could create a space for it in my private life. At the moment I seek this complementary part at home, with my family [thus working less hours]. Here I also have more freedom.'

The compensating activity at the moment is that Karin does furniture restoration – restoring old furniture that she finds somewhere and is then integrating into her household or giving away as a present. Karin categorised these activities and skills realisation as forming part of her private life.

4.3.17.5. Emerging themes

High level of work flexibility

Karin works with a lot of equipment, which she prepares and is responsible for. She is also responsible for the special effects on stage. However, the prop master interacts with all the different people and professional groups in the theatre (actors, director, technicians, costume designer, etc.) so that communication and interpersonal skills are central skills. She also needs to be able to listen and understand very well as the actors, for example, request a very particular equipment Karin then needs to make and sometimes also invent. She

underlines that this is a very specific kind of creativity that is required of her – to be able to materialise the idea of somebody else in a very concrete way. The actor has an idea and she has to produce the product the person needs or wants to use while acting.

4.3.17.6. *Learning*

Karin applies a broad variety of skills in her job. Apart from the technical skills to create specific equipment and props she realises that many of the skills she needs she acquired when she was young because she had to be very independent at a young age. She learnt to take responsibility, optimise processes, be communicative, be able to interact with many different people, be attentive, be creative. Karin learns and develops her abilities through the feed-back from others and is very responsive to the feed-back she gets.

How to manage transitions

'Well, I think I do follow a certain pattern and at some point I exactly felt this circle. And I thought 'ok, there is a phase when I conceive an idea. And then I make this idea public and start to talk about it. And because I talk about it and communicate it there is some pressure to put it into practice'. And then there is a moment when I think 'the baby is born, it is there'. Often this is the moment when I become active, when I decide to write an application or to have a concrete conversation with somebody. And at that point I am kind of ready to follow this route and to say 'well, here I am' and present myself. And it is this form of presentation that counts. I have never really relied on, well, I knew that my formal qualifications or my certificates won't get me anywhere. I've always counted on my personality. The effect that I have on others, because this was something I had experience with. I always felt that if I am authentic, if I can convey to others what is important to me and what I want from them then I can achieve something. In this moment I always felt that people were seeing me as the person who I am. And this would be a hint for me to go on. Then I could be confident about myself. And of course, others were also helping me, just by naming things or give me new input or new ideas, like trying the theatre. This I took very seriously. And I also took warnings seriously.'

Predominant mode of learning

Karin considers her learning as being intuitive and developing along challenging work. These challenges can be initiated through a particular job or task, forms of responsibilities or as well through others and also through own motivation. She says that all learning has always been self-determined in that Karin always decided on what and how to learn. If the learning process was framed or structured externally (like in school) and Karin does not have the intrinsic

motivation to learn then it does or did not work. In case of forced learning, e.g. when being aware that this is something that she now has to learn although she does not feel motivated, this is always very hard for Karin and creates blockages. Overall, the form of learning is secondary but what is key is Karin's intrinsic motivation. Still, Karin considers herself not being a school, study or seminar type of learner but Karin needs to try things out, preferably through hands-on activities. In her career Karin also learnt a lot through observation, observing others how they do things effectively. It is learning from others, also through communication but also from observing. This is very important for Karin and then she copies what she has seen.

4.3.17.7. *Follow-up interview (March 2013)*

Main development: no external changes, but new management has lead to new dynamics and changes of internal work processes. Working life overall became less important compared to overall family situation; Karin and her husband separated after having been in a relationship for 25 years.

(a) Theme 1: new colleagues and new management

Karin's former team leader had a burnout, so the management structure has changed since the last interview. On the one side a new colleague also brought new group of staff with which the interaction and cooperation is much better than with the previous team. In the interaction with the new colleagues Karin feels that her work is more highly appreciated, which gives her self-confidence and a positive work experience. This, in turn, feeds back into a positive family life – overall Karin feels more balanced and positively inspired. On the other hand she encountered problems with her new assistant supervisor, who stepped in since her direct supervisor has had a burnout. For the new assistant job profiles and responsibilities are not clearly defined with leads to conflict among some of the staff. Karin realised that dealing with these interpersonal problems also is a kind of learning process that makes her define her limits and also how to overcome tensions and negative dynamics within the team. Three possibilities may evolve as a conflict resolution approach: either a new supervisor steps in or the team get more autonomy in working without a supervisor and without the interference of the assistant supervisor or a professional mediation will be used. All three possibilities imply for Karin a new situation in terms of how to deal with conflicts at work. She sees that this hinders the effectiveness and reduces the quality of her work, which makes her being dissatisfied. She would like to resolve the conflict to achieve a good quality of her work. She thinks that the assistant supervisor in particular limits the quality of her work and the work of the team.

Asked about what she would expect from a new supervisor Karin answered that transparency – to understand why work processes are organised the way they are – would be very important and that posing questions will not be regarded as control but rather as interest. She would like that the supervisor only steps in when the team is unable to perform effectively, because for her it is the team in the first place that needs to develop its own solutions, and then if the team fails, management should be there to guide and provide support.

(b) Theme 2: anticipated changes did not happen

During the first interview Karin was considering to increase her working hours from 24 to 30 hours per week. This is no longer planned. First, because Karin at the moment is not so satisfied with her work like before. Overall she thinks that she has lost autonomy in the performance of her work and is more tied to following directives which often she does not understand. Second, it was planned that she might take over some work allocation that is currently done by a colleague who will retire very soon. Now, however, it is planned that this post will be closed as a consequence of rationalisation and saving costs.

The other possible career development that came up during the last interview was to become self-employed to be able to develop the creative aspects of Karin's work further, maybe starting from the furniture restoration that she did. However, this thought also is no longer followed or picked up. One reason is that her personal life has changed in that she separated from her husband, who has moved out of the home. She has been in this relationship for 25 years so that this constitutes a fairly dramatic change in her life. It also means that Karin is now a single mother, which also brings her professional life into a new light and restricts former anticipated or possible options.

(c) Theme 3: new period of transition

With her personal and family life having changed dramatically, Karin is now seeking to get a new orientation. She encounters a series of new challenges. One key challenge refers to managing the practical family life as a single mother, for example organising her working days when the kids are sick. On the other hand she is seeking to look insight herself to find out what she really wants for herself, and if there could be anything beyond her family life. She said that for the past 25 years all personal and professional decisions have been made compatible within a relationship framework and that now for the first time she has to take her own decisions away from any relationship context. In this sense Karin regards her current life in transition. She feels she not only had to initiate a change at work, but that also she is at the crossroads in her life, that she is starting a new phase of life. For some

parts Karin is seeking to get a new orientation in the framework of interpersonal exchange and social networks. However, many decisions she also has to take for herself.

4.3.18. Claudia, 40s, bank clerk and service manager

First interview: March 2012

Follow-up interview: January 2013

4.3.18.1. Bio sketch

Claudia lives with her partner and grown-up step son. After school she did an apprenticeship as bank clerk and worked in the bank for 22 years before redirecting her career. As a precondition for her career change, Claudia obtained university entry qualification (*Abitur*) through an adult education programme and then studied German language and journalism at the university. During this period of further training (about eight years in total) she continued working at the bank part-time mainly to finance her studies. After she had obtained her degree she decided to leave the bank and start a career that required a higher education degree. She first worked with two small IT firms as public relations manager before starting to work with a large logistics association as service manager. During the first interview she had been with this employer for four years, mainly being responsible for a wide range of public relations and coordination activities including establishing a new cooperation with China. During this period she had also followed some specialised trainings related to her new area of work. When the follow-up interview was conducted one year later she had had a burnout and had been dismissed. She was trying to get back into regular employment in the area of marketing/public relations.

During the first interview Claudia's narrative evolved around having chosen a lower qualification track because her parents did not support her to continue her education when she was young and that pursuing a higher education track in the first place was not so much career orientated, but rather related to self-realisation and fulfilling an unfulfilled dream. When she left the bank after 22 years she traded in a stable and well-paid job for a fairly insecure future. The follow-up interview focused on Claudia's efforts to get back into regular employment. Main issues were work centrality, to wish to have a structure working day and the low recognition in society of somebody who is not working.

4.3.18.2. Contextualisation

The interviews with Claudia were conducted face-to-face. The first one lasted one hour, the second one about 45 minutes. Claudia was very reflective and opened to the narrative approach.

4.3.18.3. *Work biography*

Claudia finished secondary school (*Realschule*) and did an apprenticeship as bank clerk. She actually would have liked to continue schooling but her parents suggested to follow a lower education track and did not support her in completing the *Abitur*. Claudia thus left school and trained as bank clerk and was taken on by the bank where she continued working for the following 20 years. During this period she had different positions and worked in different departments and with different working time arrangements. From the beginning she wanted to work in the credits department, which, however, at that time was a male dominated area and it was almost impossible for Claudia to move there. As compared to her male colleagues it in fact required an additional specialised training before she was accepted to work in the credit department. After five years she moved to another department to provide services to business customers and was then transferred for some years to establish a branch for the bank in the new German federal states. When she decided to acquire the *Abitur* through an adult education programme and subsequently study at the university she continued working at the bank part-time, basically to finance her studies. This worked well financially, but it was also important for Claudia that she finished her studies in the regular time frame, because otherwise it would have become financially difficult. She said that completing her university degree in the foreseen time frame was very important for her.

The decision to leave the bank was actually motivated by following her partner to live in another city that was too far to commute to form her former workplace. This coincided with the bank sector undergoing significant rationalisation, resulting in staff being deployed and branches being closed. Although there were opportunities and various offers from the management for Claudia to continue with her employer and also to prospectively move into interesting positions, she decided to leave and start something new, ideally on the basis of her new degree. Her first two jobs in this direction were with two small IT firms where Claudia was responsible for public relations, coordination work, providing services to customers, etc. These jobs were good opportunities to transfer and develop her new skills in practice. However, Claudia found the dynamics in the small IT firms irritating and unstructured compared to her job in the bank.

Since four years Claudia has now been working as service manager for a large logistics non-profit association. Her job involves public relations work, the acquisition of new members, information management, coordination of different activities and providing services to the members, which can be students, companies, networks, multipliers, etc. Since the association is not specialised to service a particular area of logistics or particular branches, the kinds of people and bodies Claudia interacts with and provides services for are very broad. Her

job requires a high level of flexibility and also mobility as Claudia has to travel frequently to workshops, conferences and other events. Since 1.5 years she is also responsible for building up cooperation with China, which involves travelling to China and establishing a network among new partners as well as providing expertise support. Overall her job is very demanding. Claudia stated that she works about 60 hours per week and needs to be highly mobile. In addition, there are even more intensive work periods, for example when they organise a yearly conference with about 3 500 participants.

4.3.18.4. *Transitions*

Transition from full-time banker to student

A major transition Claudia described had been to decide to go back to school to obtain university entry qualification and then to study. In a way, this was a transition from worker to learner, but also to pursue an unfulfilled dream. Furthermore, she wanted to prove herself and to others (maybe her parents?) that she was bright enough to obtain the *Abitur*, in particular that she even understood math. Advancing in her career was not the major aim and rather secondary. However, Claudia also felt that with the higher qualification she could not just continue as before. She said: 'in the beginning I went back for three months to work again full-time at the bank, because when I was in the adult education programme I only worked at the bank occasionally and late hours. And then I was back there, sitting there the whole day, full-time in my old job and I asked myself 'What am I doing here? Do I just continue like before, just as if I haven't changed? As if I haven't developed?''

Thus, studying was a very conscious decision, to discover new potential. And it was also an even more important step towards self-realisation.

'I studied German language, journalism and communications. That was a very conscious decision. Normally you would expect that somebody who works at the bank studies economics or law. But I said to myself 'I want a downtime for this particular period. I want to do something for myself and I don't really care about what will follow. And therefore I will not study economics, but it will be some kind of self-realisation. And I've always wanted to study German language and this was what I did. But considering subsequent employment opportunities – and because I knew that German language is not really the kick-off for a great career – I said to myself that I'll combine it with something more practical. And because I really like languages and communication I opted for journalism. And I even thought that maybe, ideally, I could combine this with my banking background, becoming the public relations and spokesperson of a bank, for example. But this is not how things developed, unfortunately.'

While Claudia thinks that maybe this ideal combination would actually have been possible, she considers that she might not have been sufficiently patient and purposeful when she had completed her studies, but took the opportunity to start her new career as service manager which she also found interesting.

Most decisive transition

For Claudia the most decisive transition had been to leave the bank after 22 years. It was a very hard decision, because she knew the entire organisation and it was her home, she had nice colleagues, a high level of work satisfaction and a very good position with benefits and a secured employment future. There are times when she misses this level of organised working life and security. But at the same time she would not like to miss how she has developed personally and professionally since then.

Future transitions

Claudia does not think that she can continue working like she is working at the moment. Three aspects in particular would need to change for her to continue her current job: The first one relates to the high number of working hours and availability demanded of her; second she needs better organisational structures with clearly defined areas of responsibilities and clear management structures; third, the situation in her work team needs to improve. To develop more distance to her job Claudia has started to sing in a choir and row in a team. She has also thought of resigning and applied to other jobs. What has prevented her for the time being to pursue this route further has been the very good relation to her supervisor, who has been seeking to improve her working situation by different means. One concrete idea that he is now considering is to establish another hierarchy and create a new position by which Claudia would progress and at the time have clear responsibilities and a supervisory role. This for her would be very attractive since she has the ambition to develop professionally and advance in her current position. However, at the time of the first interview this was just being negotiated, so far without any concrete results.

Although Claudia has had a considerable number of significant career and learning transitions, she regards this more as a process and that she gradually grew into taking over ever more challenging work. She stated that even after 10 years at the bank she would never have imagined herself to be interested in taking decisions at work or to work more conceptually. Rather she was very satisfied in just administrating her tasks, have everything well pre-structured and following orders. Today she appreciates the creative and flexible side of her work and cannot imagine herself going back to her former routine. But she underlines that this has been a very gradual process of adjustment.

4.3.18.5. *Emerging themes*

Support structures

Claudia pointed to several supporting, but also unsupportive, structures and experiences. The bank was experienced as both a hindrance to career progression as well as supportive: On the one hand, she encountered severe obstacles to develop her bank career and move into the credit department, experiencing major gender discrimination by being discriminated against her male colleagues as for her it took much longer, required persistence and finally also some further training and qualifications before she was moved to the credit department. On the other hand, for visiting the adult education programme to obtain the *Abitur* Claudia was highly supported by her former supervisor. Ultimately, she could only realise attending classes and subsequent studies, because she continued working at the bank part-time to secure a financial backup. Her supervisor wanted to keep her and arranged for unconventional working hours for Claudia so that she could combine studying and working. She also had the guarantee that during the off-term periods she could work in the bank full-time.

Second, the issue of her parents not having supported her to pursue a higher skills and qualification route was brought up several times. Ultimately, Claudia actually realised this route after her parents had moved away to another city: 'this completely freed me up for taking a new direction in my life'.

Third, redirecting her career after having obtained the master degree was not supported by her friends and colleagues, who in fact proved to be the greatest hindrance to move on. Rather than providing support, they sought to prevent Claudia from leaving the bank, the main argument being that the security, benefit structure and good working conditions at the bank would not be something one should give up for a not yet clear new professional route. While her friends and colleagues underlined the material aspect of work, moving on for Claudia was also much related to self-realisation and personal development opportunities. As her friends were not very supportive, Claudia sought support from professional networks and female career guidance programmes, which proved to be very helpful as through these structures she was strongly encouraged to pursue this new route. For her future career development this positive experience has been decisive.

Gender discrimination

Claudia's career progression within the bank was initially very difficult. When she started working at the bank in 1983 basically women were given secretarial work or jobs with low levels of responsibilities. However, from the beginning Claudia wanted to work in the credit department, which was then a male dominated area.

When all her male colleagues she had started with had outperformed her and had advanced in their career while Claudia had not, she decided to undergo another specialist training at a bank academy for three years. This qualification took place during evening hours, was very demanding and required additional mobility as the academy was farther away. Upon completion of the qualification Claudia was finally moved to the credit department.

'Well, this really made me angry! And then I decided that this really requires a visible signal and that I will additionally qualify through the bank academy. This is an extra training alongside working, which took three years and required a lot of additional efforts and long commutes since the academy was not anywhere close but I had to drive 50 kilometres one way twice a week and also on Saturdays. But this was when my boss finally understood that I was very serious about it. And he said, 'ok, she is really serious, she really wants to make a career'. And this was the starting point for placing me in an internal promotion programme of the bank in the area of credits, which was a special programme, very difficult to get into and where you had to apply and be selected based on an entry qualification test. And from then onwards it went very well for me in the credit department. But to get there was really really difficult'.

Interpersonal issues

While Claudia gets a lot of work satisfaction from challenging work, she finds the communication and interaction with her colleagues very difficult. She said that she is in a very difficult team (a team of four) that she, in principle, is assigned to direct, but she has no formal position or competence for managing the team. From her many years in the bank she was used to a very open and friendly working atmosphere where colleagues tended to support and motivate each other. What she is experiencing at the moment is a lot of competition, colleagues not displaying any interest for each others work and sometimes tendencies of mobbing. She finds herself in between and does not know how to deal with this situation.

4.3.18.6. Learning

Claudia's biography exemplifies a close interconnection of learning and work trajectory. Formal learning and informal learning thereby played a central and interconnecting role to facilitate her career progression, which, however, is also regarded as personal development and self-realisation. Claudia has always been very ambitious to improve her work performance through formal training and/or informal learning. When entering the labour market, this was related to a clear career aim: she went for three years to the bank academy to get a specialist certificate to be allowed to work in the credit department. Obtaining the *Abitur* was not job related and primarily self-realisation, but also to prove to others her

real potentials. The subsequent university studies were a combination of self-realisation and wanting a downtime, but also a means to open up new career opportunities although at the beginning not clearly targeted. When Claudia started her study courses she only had a vague idea about possible career directions but did not select her course programme solely strategically. Rather, she anticipated that with studying German language it would be difficult to find an adequate job.

Since she has been with the logistic association Claudia has pursued various formal and informal trainings. As she felt that to perform well in her job she needs some expertise in logistic she underwent a formal nine-month qualification to get an accreditation as logistics assistant. This was not required, but supported and financed by her employer. However, Claudia also felt that there were high expectations and a lot of pressure that she makes an excellent exam (which she did). She also did a Chinese language course for nine-month and underwent some further short-term training. She is also exploring training offers to improve her English. While much of this learning has been in courses, Claudia also spends considerable time learning on her own and this she finds sometimes difficult and hard. On the one hand she likes that this learning is self-directed, but it also requires a high degree of self-discipline.

Given this interconnection of learning and working, the learning periods have always been clearly defined, which was important for Claudia as this required disciplined and targeted learning. It also required a high level of self-organisation. Claudia considers this to be an effective approach to learning although she also sees that having more flexible time has positive aspects, too.

For Claudia, lifelong learning has a real practical meaning. And it is not just formal or informal learning, but also facing and managing new challenges. For example, when she flew to China for the first time, all by herself, at the age of 46, not being able to communicate and being in a totally unknown place, this was also a learning experience for her.

Another important experience is that Claudia feels that she has lost her basic confidence in her qualifications. As a banker, formal qualification combined with work experience brings about clearly defined competences somebody can trust in and be sure of. In her current field, by contrast, it is a mix of things she can do and have learnt through training-on-the job but public relations, for example, is not based on defined qualifications because basically talented people or people with the right mix of experiences can also do it and perform well. Thus Claudia states that while she knows she disposes of a very broad skill set, she has lost this basic confidence in her skills and qualifications because the required skills profiles for her current job are less clearly defined. Managing this insecurity and ambiguity also is a learning process. But these doubts about her real competences are sometimes very frustrating for Claudia. Two approaches or

patterns were mentioned as to how to deal with such situations: The first is positive thinking in terms of emphasising own skills and competences. The second strategy is being proactive – not to wait until being asked, but take the initiative and present oneself in a positive way.

Learning from interpersonal problems

Another key learning experience Claudia described was related to her difficult situation in the interaction with colleagues, which she described as follows: 'and this is also a learning experience or rather a very formative experience for me, just to understand certain dynamics and how they interrelate; and to reflect upon my own role and the role of others, their expectations and my own expectations and how to bring this all together. And then to relate it to the manager, who, however, has no ideas about how to improve the situation. This is really difficult. And the manager just delegates resolving the problems back to the team, 'well, just sort this out by yourselves'. But we are four totally different personalities in this team. This I find very very difficult.'

4.3.18.7. Follow-up interview: January 2013

Main development: burnout and unemployment

The key main development that has turned Claudia's life upside-down in the last year has been a major crisis leading to burnout about nine months ago. As she stated: 'the second theme [apart from her marriage] that really keeps my head turning around from morning till evening is the issue of work. This implies, well, that I had a burnout about nine months ago. So to say the worst case happened to me, what I had somehow anticipated since a long time and what I had also somehow tried to prevent. And this has really been a decisive turning point in my life. So that I can say that this really has turned my life completely upside-down. And this was also related to a longer stay in a hospital. And then, afterwards, something that I never could have imagined happening to me, I lost my job. I mean, that really my supervisors, indeed, had mainly economic concerns considering that I probably would not be able to perform again according to their expectations. And this resulted in me being deployed, I was just dismissed. And for me, at the moment, this means that I am finding myself in, well, the time after: where am I? What will come next? What is good for me? So, this permanent reflection: Do I still have enough resources? What will be the right thing for me to do? What kinds of mistakes did I make? There are so many questions that keep me busy. And I get the impression that there is no end to it.'

A new experience for Claudia in this situation is that she feels lost. Everything that seemed right nine months ago today does not make sense anymore. She says that with the burnout she also lost part of her identity. She

finds herself being a new person. However, she also sees this as a new challenge and learning experience, finding out new things about herself, getting to know a different side of her. But at the same time it means saying goodbye to what she was familiar with and living without any structures and direction. And she realises how much her job structured her life. And sometimes she regards this new situation as a world of freedom, but also sometimes as stress and she thinks: 'just give me a full-day of work and I'll feel good!'

There are basically four experiences Claudia reflected upon she has to come to terms with:

- (a) it is the burnout itself and all the psychological implications related to it;
- (b) however, what also is a decisive experience for Claudia is that she was dismissed – and was not needed any longer by the company. Interestingly, Claudia sees part of the problem with her supervisors – and that they did not take the heavy workload seriously in terms of Claudia being overchallenged. Claudia considered that they acted irresponsibly;
- (c) Claudia finds it very difficult to accept that she is currently unemployed. Being a new experience for her, she feels that she has failed – unemployment reflects for her a personal and professional failure. She says that she has internalised this idea that as a person she only has value when working. Claudia says that this comes from her family: 'well, in our family everything is defined on the basis of achievements and work performance'. Furthermore, she feels that being unemployed is not accepted in society. While rationally she reflects that being unemployed – and being in a financially fairly stable position at the same time – actually gives her a lot of freedom and potentially she could use this freedom to do things she likes and is interested in. However, given the internal (and in her view also external) pressures she is, in the first place, mobilising all her resources to find new employment;
- (d) Claudia reflects upon the high pressure she puts on herself in terms of performance orientation. While she sees this rooted in her family socialisation, she also plays this back to be a societal issue – that these expectations are mirrored in society and that she feels she has to comply with this performance orientation. While she says that the demands are 'inhuman' at the same time she feels she needs to comply with those demands.

There were some developments before Claudia actually encountered being burned-out. During this period Claudia went on a longer holiday and also was in a rehabilitation programme that sensitised her for the issue of work-life balance. Through this rehabilitation Claudia became aware of work-related stress and possible consequences. Still, she was not able to redirect her routine and (own and external) performance expectations. Finally, she had a break-down at work.

Future perspectives

Claudia is longing very much to get back into employment. She thinks that she would be able to handle a full-day's work, at the same time being aware of how to recognise her limits. So, for her the main issue at the moment is not whether she will be able to get back into work or not, but rather in which way to direct her career. At the age of 48 she feels that starting anew is a real challenge. Like in the first interview the issue comes up that, on the hand, she is not sure about her qualification and skills as she finds these to be rather unspecified. On the other hand Claudia feels to specialised as, for example, her expertise in logistics ties her up to having a very specialised profile that is not easily transferable to other work contexts. At the same time she has the impression that the labour market is highly dynamic – and that sometimes (at her age) she does not even understand the job descriptions and what exactly is expected of the potential candidates.

At the moment Claudia is in search of a profile where she could apply her expertise in marketing and servicing customers. She neither does consider the logistics sector to be a potential employment field nor the bank. Interestingly, when talking about future career prospects her solid background in banking was not brought into the picture. Apparently, she has closed these doors and does not want to get back into these two sectors in the future. At the same time she rationalised that the problem with marketing at the moment seems to be that there is much competition and it is difficult to enter this field. Overall, Claudia's main concern in relation to her burnout is trying to get back into work, which sounded fairly stressing. She said: 'and well, my difficulty is not only to get an orientation, but also how to manage my resources and what should I do first? Should I first try to improve my English language skills or should I train myself in new media or should I rather concentrate on how to market my skills? And this would mean redo my entire CV. And how can I find job offers? All this really keeps my busy at the moment and I feel over-challenged.'

Personal changes

What also was brought up was that Claudia married her long-term partner in May 2012. This was in fact the first point she raised when asked about what had changed since the last interview. And although she had been together with her partner for a very long time, apparently getting married constituted a major change in their relationship for Claudia. It is interesting that the marriage coincided with her burnout.

Support Structures

One of the first points of references Claudia contacted were the professional networks for female career guidance that she also had been using when she had been redirecting her career a few years ago. While she was encouraged and

supported she said that this gave her some emotional support, but that she did not get new insights. Basically, the women did not tell her new things. As a result, Claudia is seeking to get a personal career coach and maybe, additionally, also forming her own network for women in a similar situation. For example, when she was trying to find a network around the issue of burnout in her hometown she discovered that actually there was no such kind of network. She thinks that this would be important, for example also to include the relatives and other people who are indirectly affected.

Her friends are supportive in that they demonstrate a lot of empathy. However, Claudia perceives their attitude as some form of pitifulness – and that ultimately Claudia is less accepted. She sees her friends being over-challenged and helpless with this situation and thus they are kind, but not really supportive.

4.3.18.8. *Interpretation*

Overall, Claudia is impatient to get back into work. Given her circumstances Claudia did in fact reflect very little about her burnout experience, but rather focused on how to get new employment and continue her career. The issue of work-life balance was not really brought up. It gave the impression that while Claudia seemed to have reflected a lot about her past working situation, it may be likely that she would soon fall back into the old habits and structures like before. It was also interesting that she claimed the burnout having been (also) the responsibility of her former supervisors. Her own part in it was fairly little reflected. It was also interesting that her past careers, in particular her long work experience at the bank, were apparently not the area she would like to continue working in in the future. Rather, she was seeking moving into a new area with a focus on marketing, which, however, she also noted was particularly difficult to get into.

4.4. Analysis of the German interviews

4.4.1. Gendered labour market segmentation

The German sample comprised 11 male and 14 female participants aged between 35 and 48 with the exception of one woman who was 30 years old. Overall, individual career patterns reflect the gendered labour market segmentation whereby couples divide up their work and family roles as suggested by the male breadwinner model with the man working full-time and the women with children working part-time. Women also tend to have disruptive careers as they typically stay home when taking a longer period of maternity/parental leave (for the female sub-sample of this investigation maternity leave was taken between one and eight years). 12 of the 14 women had children

of their own, all of which had interrupted their work biography at least for a certain period of time. Eight women had two children or more.

The men in the sample, by contrast, tended to display continuous careers without longer periods of interruption with the exceptions of those who had been temporarily unemployed. These progressive career patterns implied that, despite job and employment changes, men tended to display less disruptive careers and were less likely to have major career redirections and have more progressive careers, typically based on a further qualification or specialisation (e.g. the *Meister* qualification) that supported their career advancement and further professional development, which in some cases could also mean becoming self-employed. While the men were not necessarily higher qualified than the women when starting their career, they were more likely to advance further and follow traditional career progression routes.

Women were more likely to have disruptive careers and also to redirect their career more frequently. As the German labour market usually requires a formal qualification to realise a career change this means that the women underwent several formal qualifications and thus spent a considerable period of time in formal training. Overall, career redirections that involved another formal qualification were found more often among the female participants and it was not unlikely that the women had undergone two or sometimes even three different full qualification programmes, resulting in having spent six to nine years in formal vocational school-based or apprenticeship training. The other major transition women experienced was when moving in and out of work due to taking parental leave.

4.4.2. Reactive radical career change

Apart from those having either more steady or continuous careers, several participants experienced a radical career change due to structural or circumstantial factors and experiences of personal, professional or political crises. Examples included the death of a partner or burnout. Also represented were participants for whom the German reunification presented a major political restructuring, which also opened up completely new career options and thus induced a radical career change. Another pattern that might as well be considered a German phenomenon was represented by individuals, who spent endless time in (publicly funded) higher education programmes, being uncertain about which direction to take and keeping on searching for a possible future professional direction, but ultimately never completed any of the courses they had started. For example, one participant had spent nine years at the university, trying out different study courses without completing any of these courses ever and which in the end made him drifting rather than getting a clearer idea about any future professional direction.

4.4.3. Drivers of careers

In structuring or developing their career pathways individuals were pursuing different strategies. However, some overall drivers of careers and career transitions could be identified for the German sample:

- (a) Job security – getting a permanent contract or securing stable employment
With new uncertainties over job stability on the German labour market since the 1990s, and more prominent since the financial crisis of 2008, getting a permanent contract and securing stable employment could be a strong driver of individual careers. There were examples where the career narrative focused on getting and securing permanent employment, for example after a longer period of having worked on the basis of temporary contracts or of having experienced periods of unemployment. One question in the German interview guide was particularly geared towards identifying risk taking attitudes. To this question almost all interviewees answered that people should ‘follow their heart’ and interests when directing their professional choices or redirecting their careers, even if that might involve high levels of risk taking and giving up a stable employment situation. Two factors, however, were thereby taken into consideration, the first being former experiences and the second one being family responsibilities. For example, people who had experienced periods of unemployment and precarious employment conditions would be more considerate or reluctant to give up a stable and secure employment situation in search of a new career pathway. Also, interviewees were much concerned about family responsibilities, i.e. if somebody needs to take care of children and has a family, a secured job and stable income were valued differently than if somebody was alone. In addition, personal risk taking affinity was also mentioned to play a key role.
- (b) Career progression
Others had clearly set their mind on advancing in their career. For securing stable employment and advancing further the role of networks and support structures were emphasised. From the experience of several interviewees advancing in a job and making a career very much depends on mentors and supervisors who will promote the person. For both men and women the role of mentors and networks played a key role. Also, when finding and getting a job or the initial apprenticeship, it was in some cases the parents who organised everything. In particular, the male participants underlined the importance of getting support from seniors. Securing stable employment and career advancement was further linked to financial stability and independence. Financial independence was contextualised as independence from parents, but also from the social security system. One example was the desire to secure employment in order not to become dependent on unemployment benefits. Additionally, it was linked to being

able to afford a certain lifestyle for oneself and the family. Finally, it could also be a result of financial pressures and obligations, for example because the family had built a house.

(c) Working as self-fulfilment

Apart from employment security, career advancement and generating a stable income, self-fulfilment could also be identified as a driver to learning and career. Particularly participants who perceived their vocational specialisation and current job as a compromise, or had made such compromises in the past, were emphasising that enjoyment and self-fulfilment though the work they were doing were the most important aspects. These individuals typically were still seeking to optimise the level of their work satisfaction. In striving to achieve the desired work-life balance and input-output balance in terms of job dedication and job satisfaction combining dependent employment with self-employment could be one possible arrangement. Income and employment security were thereby identified as to be secondary or only observed as to ensure a minimum standard, while self-realisation would be prioritised.

(d) Obstacles to career development and transitions

Where individuals experienced obstacles or downward careers, lack of support structures could be an issue, both related to finding or getting a job but also related to training. Lack of support was also brought up as a hindrance to initiating a career change and/or managing career transitions. The problem of getting adequate support was also in some cases related to not being able to follow particular training courses. This came out strongly in particular for women, who had children and for whom a formal qualification would be a precondition to get back into work or redirect their individual career. For example, Andrea received much support from her family with having the grandparents from both sides close by who would take care of her children so that she could follow some intensive training courses that sometimes lasted for several weeks. In the case of Andrea lack of appropriate child care to follow training courses emerged as a dominant theme as apparently child care facilities are typically targeted to support mothers who are working, but not when they are in training. Overall, timely and flexible child care facilities are not available, with provision often highly bureaucratic and very complicated to arrange.

Career guidance and counselling could be both a hindrance to as well as a promoter of individual career progression. Particularly where participants had become unemployed due to burnout or personal crisis, experience with the employment agency and public career guidance services were reported to have been not just positive and decisive for the individual work biography, but even more dramatically they could be virtually life-saving. On the other

hand, also negative experiences were reported where career advice was either not helpful or did not provide any useful information needed, because the counsellors were not informed or did not have the required knowledge. In most of these cases career counselling had not been really damaging, but was just not very useful.

4.4.4. The role of learning in managing transitions

How transitions were perceived depended much on the individual perspective, individual resources, socialisation and former experiences. Some interviewees tended to ignore transition processes (avoidance) while others saw them as a new opportunity coming up (taking chances). Others were purposefully initiating a transition to redirect their individual career, while another group experienced transitions as a major disruption in their life to the extent that it could make any subsequent employment impossible or at least very difficult. Those individual attitudes can be interpreted as different approaches to managing or dealing with transitions. Relevant factors that determined how individuals perceived transitions included personal resources and dispositions; (positive or negative) experience with former transitions; support structures; and having alternatives, among others. However, individuals also displayed particular patterns of approaches or attitudes towards actual or possible transitions and this, in turn, shaped how they managed transitions in their life. Learning thereby can play a strategic role.

In this context formal and informal learning can support transitions processes. The most likely cases for Germany were when individuals used formal training to redirect their career or advance in their career, thus using learning in an instrumental way to facilitate transitions. Similarly, informal learning like training on-the-job could be instrumental to realise a job transition or changing the workplace. Learning from others at work, learning through colleagues, peers or supervisors, for example in form of familiarisation training when moving into a new position, were identified to be very important. In addition, in some of the social, educational and health care professions represented further training courses played a key role for deepening one's own knowledge and specialisation, which in these professions is not so much linked to career advancement but rather to moving horizontally and developing more expert knowledge. As people would move horizontally between institutions, employers and/or workplaces such form of learning could also be regarded as instrumental to facilitate and support transition processes. Finally, learning can have a compensating function for lack of work opportunities or limited working hours. We identified those compensating strategies as a 'learner career', whereby individuals' learning trajectory would be prioritised or be perceived as much more important than their working life. Overall, participants underlined that continuing

training and learning were mostly useful and enriching when being embedded in individuals' biographies and geared towards professional needs and interests. Disconnected, abstract and theoretical learning with little connection to the actual work practice was perceived as little useful and a 'waste of time'.

Apart from these obvious links between learning and individual careers the transition process itself can be regarded as a learning experience that could be decisive for any subsequent career development. Thus, people learn in and from transitions. Also, going through different learning and work experiences in search of what to do professionally and finding out what could be 'the right pathway' could be identified as a learning journey. On the other hand, some participants followed a particular learning track and went through a series of career transition processes to ultimately seeking to realise a very particular career aim, but this initially defined aim got lost on the way so that in the end the learning experience had a surprising or unintended outcome. Also, managing a transition successfully could be a key learning experience that helped individuals to gain confidence and grow personally and professionally. In particular, this experience of success was identified to be a vital source to be able to project or anticipate possible transitions in the future. Self-confidence through having managed transition processes successfully and having this consciously linked to a learning process can thus help individuals to rely better on their skills, competence and potentials.

In the following all interview participants are being categorised according to their particular attitude to manage transitions and their learning experiences in and from transitions they displayed in the interviews. Particularly for the female participants adjusting their career to the family demands is a dominant pattern, thus the number of children is indicated.

4.4.4.1. *Strategic approach/being purposeful about transitions (with a more or less clear career direction and/or the premise of securing stable employment and/or an income)*

- learning predominantly being instrumental and functional
- no risk taking

Frank (janitor working for a large housing company, two children)

Frank had one major transition that he initiated himself to improve his overall employment security. He was strategic about it and easily found a new job that complied with the criteria of job security and regular income. In terms of professional interests Frank had to make compromises, but he thinks that this is acceptable. Overall, he is very satisfied with his job, acknowledging that he subordinates professional interests to job stability.

Thomas (electronic technician working for a medium size company, one child)

Thomas is an electronic technician with *Meister* qualification working for a large company in the food industry. He has been working for this employer for about 20 years. Before, Thomas had two other employers, the first company closed down and in the second case Thomas was seeking to induce a job change because he was tired of shift work. About 11 years ago he was put on a career track to become team leader based on completing the *Meister* qualification. While Thomas himself never pursued advancing in his career to a managerial position, today he is glad that he made this move, seeing himself remaining with this employer for the rest of his working life, but if necessary, he trusts that he would easily find new employment in his area of expertise. Thomas' career narrative presents a typical German male progressive technicians career that was backed up by his employer and wife.

Nina (communications clerk, two children)

Nina's career narrative revolves around balancing a pronounced work orientation with her family life in a fairly traditional way, accommodating the career of her husband and own family values by working part-time and having switched to less challenging work. Her life is structured around a clear family priority, but at the same time Nina also displays a clearly expressed work dedication. Work thereby fulfils a social, networking and recognition function rather than personal fulfilment or securing an income. Nina seeks stable and continuous employment and a job she likes, but without having any particular career or learning ambitions in the near future. Career transitions (and family building) have been well planned to secure continuous employment and predictability.

Andrea (physiotherapist, three children)

Physiotherapy has always been Andrea's dream job since the age of 16 and subsequent learning and training has been directed straight in this direction. Formal further training plays a key role and all the courses Andrea has done thus far were in the area of working with children. It has always been clear for Andrea that this will be her area of specialisation. Andrea has always strategically pursued this path, thereby using formal learning and training as a means to achieve her professional goals. Apart from this, working hours have been adjusted to accommodate Andrea's family commitments so that in the last years she was confined to marginal employment (10 hours per week).

Anna (nursery teacher, one child)

Anna initially trained and worked as tax assistant to then redirect her career to become a nursery teacher, which involved another two years training. After

completion she worked for five years with a faith-based youth association, then in a kindergarten and lately switched to work with children with special needs. She has had several career transitions and redirections, which have all been well planned, using career counselling services and formal training to support her career changes. Thereby, Anna has been striving to secure permanent employment since she has thus far only had temporary contracts. With just having had her first child future employment possibilities have become uncertain.

Sabine (paediatric nurse, no children)

Sabine has been working as paediatric nurse with the same employer in a rehabilitation centre all her working life for now over 23 years, but in different positions. The driver for changing positions and employment arrangements has been seeking to work part-time to balance work and her private life. Nineteen years ago Sabine achieved a 'privileged permanent position' where she works day shifts only and the desired number of hours of 30 hours per week. While she has tried several times to redirect her career to specialise as speech therapist, the stable and privileged employment position has been the main reason why she ultimately never completed other career and learning pathways she started. Despite some dissatisfaction at work, the wish to keep her stable employment has locked her into the current position.

Gabi (bank assistant, two children)

Gabi works part-time in the local bank branch. She has been working with this bank for 20 years, but in different branches in the region. She trained in the former East and although having undergone a so called re-accreditation course of nine months to get the equivalent West-German certificate, she finds herself at the lower end of career options in the bank. She has remained at the service point/referral desk ever since. Her career narrative is structured around supporting the career of her partner and accommodating family commitments with her own career interests and ambitions being secondary. This combines with a competitive work environment where Gabi does not see that she can ever improve her current position. She thus, in the first place, seeks to balance work and family life and regards herself as the balancing factor in her family.

4.4.4.2. *Strategic approach/being purposeful about transitions (with a more or less clear career direction and/or the premise of securing stable employment and/or an income)*

- learning being instrumental but also much more flexible and self-directed
- high level of risk taking, seeking challenging work

Paul (self-employed carpenter, no children)

Paul's career narrative focuses on the transition from dependent employment to self-employment and the formal and financial obstacles, lack of guidance and lack of support. It is also structured around the ambivalence of being self-employed in a one man business and the notion that carpentry was not really his first professional choice, but rather presented a compromise. However, while Paul has been exploring different routes in this professional area, seeking to link carpentry to a more creative approach, self-employment has been a clear direction that he pursued and stuck to over a long period of time despite the different obstacles he encountered. Having a challenging and interesting job is very important for him so that he finds compromising rather difficult.

Brigitte (vocational advisor, one child)

Brigitte schooled in a medium-size town in the former East and, after the reunification, went to a *Berufsakademie* specialising in commerce and economics. After working for a SME for some time she applied at the local employment agency and worked there first in the accountancy department to then gradually move into the position of vocational counsellor. This involved changing job positions four times before getting to her current job. Brigitte sees her career as progressively advancing against her own strategic approach and having confidence in her skills, but also risk taking and having been lucky a couple of times. She might consider moving on, but at this point in time feels that she still needs to give priority to her family. She seeks stable employment, challenging work and engagement with learning by at the same time observing her work-family balance.

Barbara (nursery teacher, two children, single mother)

Barbara trained as a nursery teacher in the former East. In her early career she sought to try out different areas and pathways, partly related to the situation of her partner (moving) and partly due to the new working and living possibilities that the reunification process provided for. Since 1996, Barbara has now been working with the same employer in a nursery school as special needs educator. Within this field she explores new challenges and further training has been playing a key role. As a single mother Barbara has mostly worked part-time to combine her work, learning and family commitments. She may consider working more independently in the future.

Fatma (furrier, translator, elderly care nurse, three children)

Fatma has undergone several formal trainings to redirect her career, combining a strong work orientation with family commitments. She initially trained and worked as a furrier, then worked as a seamstress and then as a translator for public

institutions (e.g. at the court) for about 14 years. As the translation jobs involved a lot of travelling, Fatma wanted to redirect her career. After a one year orientation phase and an internship she underwent another three years training programme as elderly care nurse which she completed in 2008 at the age of 40. Since then she has been working in this profession. The last training period from 2005 to 2008 has been especially demanding and challenging. For Fatma formal and informal learning and a high learning commitment and training on-the-job have been instrumental to redirect her career.

4.4.4.3. *Seeking to avoid transitions or longer transition periods*

Rainer (upholsterer with an automobile supplier, two children)

Rainer seeks to skip transitions, to avoid them and get away with them as soon as possible by becoming active and organising that his routine life can go on as usual as soon as possible. Rainer hates when things are not moving forward (this connects well to the assembly line he works with) and can also not understand how people, who become unemployed, can become so unmotivated that they remain still. He needs to have a job and work to sustain himself and his family and secure an income to be financially independent. With this orientation own professional interests are being subordinated.

4.4.4.4. *Being relaxed about transitions (taking chances, reconstructing also conflicting developments in a sense making perspective)*

Christian (social worker in the public sector, two children)

Christian did not have a master plan for his individual career, but many incidents and transitions happened by coincidence (e.g. admission to his study place by lottery). Overall Christian has always been quite relaxed about things just happening by chance, seeking to make the best out of it, but also being proactive in trying things. At least looking back his work biography makes sense to him, because he feels satisfied with his job and ultimately also about how his individual career has developed thus far. He is trusting that things also will develop well in the future, even if restructuring processes occur. He is positive that in one way or another, his working life will go on.

Ali (factory worker with automobile supplier and parliament representative, one child)

Ali has been taking chances throughout his life, seeking to make the best of a situation. One good example is his learning career up to the level *Abitur* (university entry qualification) that initially developed from a situation of remaining without an apprenticeship and thus being unemployed. His learning career changed from an alternative route to employment to a main progression route,

which he abandoned when he was offered a full-time permanent contract at a factory so that he switched from university student to unskilled worker. Also his political career developed by coincidence and unsystematically. Ali says that he never planned either of these careers and regards himself as somebody who takes chances, has many interests and a high learning affinity. He anticipates a future transition, which he thinks will bring him back neither to the factory, nor necessarily into politics, but may rather take a completely new direction. He is relaxed about this upcoming change and positive that something interesting will develop.

Peter (IT systems administrator working in the public sector, two children)

Overall, Peter does not consider his transitions as having been disruptive. Rather he has been taken advantage of new opportunities that came up and that today fit well into a more or less coherent work biography where most of the things he has been doing in his life have been or are being useful. He says: 'well, yes, sometimes I am not sure whether the different stages just fit or whether I make them fit. But indeed it always feels as if they just fit. And so far the transitions have been fairly smooth. For me the particular situation actually used to come up as an opportunity that then actually fitted to the rest and overall picture. On the other hand, I am also relatively open to new solutions that come up. I don't have to take a particular career path. In fact, I don't have to make any career, I am not particularly career oriented. I just want to make an income, much more is not really necessary. And this I think makes me being open for new things that come up. And if something comes up that works well, well, then it fits. And insofar I never really experienced these transitions as disruptive but rather as chances'.

Karin (prop master, two children)

Karin has had several transitions, trying out different possible career pathways including studying. Many different pathways she started she never completed. As an alternative to working she stayed home with the kids for eight years before seeking another vocational orientation that lead her to work with a restorer in a museum for some time. She eventually did an internship at the theatre as prop master, which she is still doing in a combination of dependent and freelance work. Karin's career narrative evolves around being in search of what to do professionally and trying out different things, not to make a career, but to combine work with self-fulfilment.

4.4.4.5. *Actively constructing transitions/being in search of new challenges*

Roland (electrician in dependent employment but also self-employed, two children)

Roland has had many job changes and transitions. In his view those derived from his curiosity to learn and discover new things and the feeling of getting bored when having done something for a while. Coupled with being an electrician never having been his dream job this has resulted in having explored fairly diverse professional routes, but also with having done a broad variety of things in his professional area. Through this process Roland's technical skills have become fairly advanced and are highly valued, which in the end has always brought him back to his initial professional field. This is one of the dominant career narratives in Roland's biography. Despite periods of unemployment and some negative experiences of transitions Roland has always kept his optimism and positive thinking about moving on and future job perspectives.

4.4.4.6. *Being lost in transitions/being in search*

Michael (injobber in an activation programme, no children)

Michael initiated several transitions due to being dissatisfied with a current work or learning situation. Thereby, he regards transitions as a possibility for reflection and trying out something new, but also as yet another experience of dissatisfaction, emphasising the general feeling and career pattern of drifting and not knowing what to do professionally.

Sandra (speech therapist, two children)

After completion of secondary education (*Abitur*) Sandra spent about two years doing different jobs, travelling and also studying at university for a couple of months. She then did a 2.5-year training programme to become a masseur and worked for different employers over the coming years on an on-and-off basis always being dissatisfied and knowing that she wanted to do something else. She also spent several years at home taking care of her two children. During that time Sandra started (but never completed) a course for alternative medicine. Finally, she got a retraining funded to qualify as speech therapist. For about 10 years Sandra has now worked in this profession (mostly part-time), but is exploring other career pathways, maybe going back to alternative medicine. For Sandra her transitions were very much perceived as disruptions initiated by herself as to deal with career or other changes in her life. These disruptions implied fairly radical changes, which for Sandra was a way to be able to see her situation from a distance, going away (also physically) to not think about the situation anymore. Giving up a career path was often associated with discomfort and unpleasant experiences from which Sandra sought to distance herself.

Britta (gardener, one child)

Britta trained as a gardener and worked in this area before she went back to school to obtain the *Abitur* (university entry qualification) through an adult education programme. Subsequently she started to study languages and cultural studies, but never completed any of these courses because she became pregnant. Since over 15 years she has been a single mother taking care of her child and having undergone several formal training courses. She has now been unemployed for a considerable period of time living on the unemployment benefit which she tops up with irregular jobs. When the first interview was conducted Britta was in a one-year training programme funded by the employment agency. Britta has, over the past decade, developed a learner's identity. She regards trainings as a form of personal development and an opportunity for reflection rather than being instrumental to get into regular employment. Ultimately she thinks that undergoing training programmes is more compatible with her role as single mother than working. Professionally she remains being in search.

4.4.4.7. *Radical career break due to personal, professional or political crisis*

Martin (injobber, project coordinator, no children)

Martin became a successful self-made fashion designer, who ran his own growing fashion business for 12 years fairly successfully. When his partner died he also lost his job and business. He then underwent a retraining as electronic publisher/web designer and worked for an IT company and another firm for a couple of years, but also experiences seven years of unemployment and become depressed and ill. His narrative evolves around regaining strength and self-confidence over many years and overcome this experience of crisis to get back into regular employment, which is a great desire, because Martin likes working and has a broad variety of skills and work experience.

Andreas (machine assembly technician/journalist, one child)

Andreas had a radical career change from a technical profession to become a journalist. This changed occurred during the period of the German reunification, which was also a precondition to make this move possible. The new political environment made it possible for Andreas to explore individual interests and dispositions and seek to shape his individual career accordingly. It all occurred in the same period: shift of political environment, which constituted a situation of crisis and instability; moving from the former East to the West; shift from a technical professional track to journalism; and a shift from a prestructured and expected career to defining own professional interests and initiating a major transition to follow this route.

Anke (injobber, unskilled factory worker, two children)

Anke worked for 25 years with different employers and in different regions of the country, mainly piecework and long working hours. She first worked with an automobile manufacturer assembling parts and then for a company that produced medical supplies. Her career was mainly driven by earning as much money as possible with the idea to emigrate to Canada at the age of 50. Some years ago Anke had a burnout, was admitted to a psychiatric clinic for almost a year and has now been in an activation programme since two years. For Anke, learning has significantly facilitated transitions. First, for the first 25 years formal training helped her to upgrade her skills to move between jobs and employers in a progressive way. Second, learning during the transition into unemployment combined with a period of personal crisis has helped her to actually overcome a personally very difficult situation. Some of this learning process was guided professionally and to date Anke is still in therapy. In her current position formal and informal learning help Anke to get back to normal life. She now manages her life on a day-to-day basis, with the professional career or future dreams being secondary of all her concerns. The activation programme for her is a learning experience that helps her to redirect her working and personal life.

Claudia (bank clerk, service manager, no children)

Claudia had a steady, progressive career as bank clerk, working at a bank for 22 years before redirecting her career. As a precondition for her career change, Claudia obtained university entry qualification (*Abitur*) through an adult education programme and then studied German language and journalism at the university. During this period of further training (about eight years in total) she continued working at the bank part-time mainly to finance her studies. With her new qualification, she first worked with two small IT firms as public relations manager before changing to work with a large logistics association as service manager. During the first interview she had been with this employer for four years, mainly being responsible for a wide range of public relations and coordination activities including establishing a new cooperation with China. One year later she had had a burnout and had been dismissed. She was trying to get back into regular employment in the area of marketing/public relations. Main issues were work centrality, to wish to have a structured working day and the low recognition in society of somebody who is not working.

4.4.4.8. *Hybrid strategies to manage transitions*

Silke (script writer, two children)

Silke has taken chances and by coincidence became a script writer based on her talents. With a creative approach, Silke combines dependent employment with

freelance work and having a family. At the same time Silke seeks to manage a transition by actively engaging with the new situation by at the same time creating continuity with former arrangements, jobs, tasks, colleagues and structures. This strategy to rely on continuity and former structures makes her commuting every week a fairly long distance. Silke tries out new work arrangements and is also exploring new avenues professionally by at the same time making sure she secures a main income for the family. It describes exploration and creativity combined with minimal risk taking.

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CHAPTER 5.

Spanish national report

5.1. Contextual background of the Spanish education and qualifications system

In 1990 the Law of General Regulation of the Education System established a ten-year period of compulsory education, fostering the professional and social prestige of vocational training with the objective of putting it on a European level. As a consequence, at the end of the 20th century, compulsory schooling was introduced for those aged six to 16 years. However, most start their schooling before and end it later. This legislation has brought Spain in to line with other European countries (Head of State, 2006).

Upper-secondary education is also regulated by this law and covers two courses and is developed in three different modalities. Organised in a flexible mode, students can choose compulsory and optional subjects. Students who obtain a positive evaluation will obtain the upper-secondary degree. After obtaining this degree, students can choose to join the labour marker, to register for upper vocational training or access tertiary education. To access university, students must pass an exam which is only for those with an upper-secondary degree.

Vocational training includes intermediate and upper courses which have as a main objective to prepare students to perform qualified professions, access to employment and active participation in social, cultural and economic life. The Law has introduced a major flexibility in its access and in the connections between the different vocational training courses. It has also established different connections between general education and vocational training to promote permanent education which has a consequence for a more flexible educative system.

In Spain, it is the responsibility of educational administrations to organise the programmes of vocational qualification (SGP, social guarantee programme) which are aimed at students over 16 years who have not obtained the compulsory secondary education degree. The objective of SGP is to obtain the vocational competences included in level one of the *National catalogue of professional qualification* regulated by Law 5/2002, June 19th, of qualifications and vocational training (Head of State, 2002) as well as increase their possibilities of satisfactory labour insertion and basic competence to continue with their studies.

Students who pass the compulsory modules in which the SGP is organised obtain an academic certification issued by the educational administration. This

certification proves the acquisition of vocational competences included in the *National catalogue of professional qualification*. In terms of the compulsory degree for secondary education, students who have acquired the basic competences and objectives of the level can access upper secondary education, intermediate vocational training, arts and design intermediate studies, and intermediate studies on sport and the labour market.

In Spain, vocational training is understood as those formative actions to obtain qualified competences to carry out professions, to access the labour market and to actively participate in the social, cultural and economic life. It includes training in the competences of professions and the actions for the labour insertion and reinsertion of workers as well as those orientated to continuous training. This Law regulates only the initial vocational training which takes part in the education system and which includes training courses with a structure which is organised into modules, with variable duration and with theoretical and practical contents adequate for each profession.

Vocational training in the Spanish education system (Head of State, 2002) contributes to the acquisition of competences that allow students to:

- (a) develop the general competences of the qualification or qualifications of each profession;
- (b) understand the organisation and characteristics of each productive sector, the mechanisms to labour insertion, and knowledge of the labour legislation as well as debts and duties in their labour relations;
- (c) develop self-learning and work in teams, competences as well as training in the prevention and resolution of conflicts in all fields of personal, family and social life.
- (d) promote effective equal opportunities between men and women in the access to education to allow all types of professional options as well as their exercise;
- (e) work under health and safety conditions, avoiding the risks derived from the job;
- (f) develop a professional identity which motivates future learning and adaptation to the evolution of productive processes and social change;
- (g) consolidate the entrepreneurial spirit for developing entrepreneurial activities and initiatives.

In Spain, the access to intermediate vocational training is for students with secondary education degrees, while the access to upper vocational training is for those with upper secondary degrees. The access to vocational training is also valid for those who pass an exam regulated by the educative administrations. Despite the fact that there are several studies that point out a close connexion between educational success and social class (Calero, 2006; Martínez, 2007), evidence from European projects (such as Includ-ed, 2009) showed that, when

successful educational actions are introduced in education institutions, these social inequalities could be overcome⁽¹⁸⁾. Consequently, there is a direct relation between educational and social inclusion where, as data demonstrates, the higher the educational level the lesser the risk of social exclusion (and, therefore, higher access to the labour market, to housing and even better health). The main results show, first, that the most unfavourable situation in our labour market is experienced mainly by workers with less education (Navarro Gómez, Caparrós, 2003).

The VET system in Spain is, therefore, offered at both an intermediate level upper secondary level and at higher tertiary level. Those who do not obtain the school leaving certificate (around 30%) now enter vocational initiation programmes (VIP). About a third of school leavers enter intermediate vocational programmes which are taught over two years either at a vocational school or at a school which provides both an academic and vocational curriculum. The type of specialist programmes offered is determined by regional autonomous communities and local labour market needs. If a student successfully completes at intermediate level they can apply to take the higher level provided they pass an entrance exam. Recent changes now allow access to university upon successful completion at the higher level. Both programmes include three months training in a workplace at the end of the programme. Many obtain jobs through this means. Both the intermediate and higher level vocational programmes award students with a diploma which is nationally recognised from the Ministry of Education. Career guidance is available in schools and in adult education. While vocational policy reform is led centrally by the government it is done through a 'general council on VET which brings the autonomous communities, trade unions and employers together. According to OECD 'participation of adults in formal or non-formal education in Spain is below the OECD average for all levels of education. In 2007 overall 31% of 25-64 year olds participated in formal or non-formal training, while the OECD average was 41%.' (OECD, 2012, pp. 12-13). The OECD report (2012) lists the following strengths of the Spanish VET system:

- engagement of the social partners and other stakeholders;
- effective policy development;
- sustaining lifelong learning through permeability and transitions;
- a coherent system of qualifications;
- using vocational programme to reduce dropout;
- effective workplace learning.

The challenges outlined by OECD are:

- keeping vocational schools and staff up-to-date;

⁽¹⁸⁾ <http://creaub.info/included/about/>

- ensuring students sustain and develop core academic skills;
- modernising career guidance;
- furthering the development of workplace learning.

Some governmental support in the form of various grants is available to adults who opt to take vocational training courses and these grants used to support courses (general grants) may have one or several of the following aspects:

- (a) grant-salary or compensation for not having salary as a consequence of taking a vocational course;
- (b) support for travel from home to the school centre or the place where the learner has to do the practices belonging to the course;
- (c) support for accommodation if living away from the family-home;
- (d) support for school resources (books, etc.);
- (e) support for tuition in private or half-private/public school centres;
- (f) support for learners in the programme of professional qualification for beginners who demonstrate proficiency;
- (g) support related to municipalities.

Higher education also provides an important pathway for career transitions in Spain as evidenced by the participants in this study. Higher education was transformed in Spain following the end of the dictatorship in 1975. Under the dictatorship, and before, the higher education system was tightly controlled by laws and regulations issued by the state. The new democracy established a constitution in 1978 which included reform of the higher education system. There are now 50 public universities which 91% of the student population attend and 27 private universities. Of the latter seven are owned by the Catholic Church. The private universities have strong links with industry and are aimed at the privileged groups in society who possess cultural and economic capital. In contrast many state universities are over-populated. The government of the education system is divided between the state, the Autonomous Communities (such as Catalonia and the Basque country) and the universities.

After the transition to democracy there was a policy interest in providing and promoting adult education as a means of tackling the high illiteracy rates amongst adults which was a legacy of the Franco era: different proposals were made as to to tackle the problem of literacy, encourage practical adult education and link non-formal educational activity with social and cultural involvement of people.

Education is viewed as key to the social and economic integration into Spanish society. In the 1990s a new law on education was introduced – the Law of the General System of Education (LOGSE) (Head of State, 1990). The current law which regulates this was passed in 2009. The law promoted diversity rather

than equality. Adults who do not possess the school leaving qualification can apply to university but they have to be 25+ and take an entrance exam. The process is called 'access for older than 25'. The exam is set by each individual university. Although the entrance exam attracts several candidates hoping for career enhancement, the pass rate is low. The exam only considers their academic abilities and not their work experience. Universities keep only 1 to 3% of their places for students who choose to enter university by this route. This pathway is considered as an objective for those who are in the labour market but who would like to go to university. Courses to prepare for the exam are offered by the Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia (UNED), adult education schools and popular schools. The latter two are independent of the state and offer a wide range of courses.

Adult education is another educational pathway, with adult education centres offering a range of provision from literacy, undergraduate and postgraduate studies to activities of socio-cultural awareness and community development. Four regions or autonomies have, since 1990, approved laws on adult education: Andalucia, Catalonia, Galicia and Valencia. In Spain the adult education movement was strongly influenced initially by the theory and practice of Freire and, since the 1980s, by Habermas and the theory of communicative action.

The number of young people participating in a university education has increased dramatically over the years so that 1.5 million out of a population of 45 million study for a degree. Currently 33% of women and 24% of men aged between 24 and 34 are graduates. However, there is a high drop-out rate after exams at the end of year one. However, those attending universities are mostly from the middle classes. Spain has a high rate (30%) of young people who fail to complete their compulsory secondary education (OECD, 2012).

In relation to financial support the university system provides a scholarship programme which is targeted at students from economically deprived backgrounds. People can also apply to study at university if they have upper vocational training but again universities only reserve 1 to 3% of its places for people from this group.

There is evidence to suggest that having a university degree or qualified vocational training is beneficial for employability in times of an economic crisis. The unemployment rate in 2009 for people aged between 25 and 65 was about 18.8%. However, for those with a higher education qualification the rate was 8.8% compared to 21.7% for those with a low level educational qualification (primary or secondary education) (Tobarra, 2010).

5.2. The labour market context

Spain is currently undergoing a severe economic crisis which is affecting all sectors of the labour market in terms of, for example, job losses and cuts in pay. The crisis began five years ago with the collapse of Spanish property boom which was labour-intensive. The first quarter of 2013 has seen the unemployment rise to its highest figure of 27.2% of the workforce. In 2007 it stood at 7.9% and the situation is worse for those under the age of 25 as the unemployment rate for this group is 57.2%. In total more than six million people are now unemployed which is having not only an economic cost but also personal, material and social costs for those in this situation. During 2012 the economy shrunk by 1.37%. Austerity measures have been put in place and labour laws have been reformed.

The government and social partners in social dialogues in 2008 and 2011 agreed that the Spanish economy had moved from high economic growth and employment to a sharp economic slowdown which had a negative impact on both business activity and employment rates. There was a negative impact of the international economy in Spain, especially in relation to the increase in the oil price and raw materials, and of the financial problems derived from the property market and the lack of control and deregulation of financial sector. The most important consequences for Spanish families is the rise of unemployment, inflation, difficulties to access loans, indebtedness and less capacity for consumption.

But the Spanish economy also has some strengths in respect from the preceding periods, such as a higher qualification of its labour force, more modernised and international enterprises, its belonging to the European Union and the social dialogue between government and economic and social stakeholders. One of the main objectives for Spain is the generation of employment and of a long term sustainable economic growth.

The priorities outlined in the key documents by government and social stakeholders such as UGT, CEOE, CEPYME or CCOO are to facilitate the relocation of unemployed people, to guarantee social support and to invest in human capital through improving its education system, decreasing school failure, fostering vocational training and linking it to employment, and, finally, widening the research capacity and the innovation of science and technologies and of enterprises.

Recent governmental action sought to promote measures to promote transitions to stable employment and professional requalification of unemployed people, established a clear commitment to change the productive model to avoid the structural weakness of the Spanish economy. One of the main objectives is to avoid the dependence of activity sectors with higher occupation but also with higher seasonality and unemployment: building sector, manufacturing industry,

trade, catering industry and food and drink services; and progress towards a solid economic and sustained growth which generates employment.

Some reforms were also proposed for the labour field to promote investment and the creation of employment. Temporarily it was necessary to implement a crash programme in 2011 to decrease unemployment among young people and long-term unemployment, to facilitate the relocation of people who have finished unemployment benefits and the organisation of actions to improve employability of low-qualified people. Some of the most relevant measures are the exceptional employment programme for transitions to permanent contracts, the programme of professional requalification for people who have finished unemployment benefits, actions to improve employability which combines professional and educational orientation for job seeking and the inclusion of unemployed people in training schemes.

Other actions were designed to improve employability and active employment policies in relation to the necessities of enterprises to cover job vacancies and to convert employment services in the best tools to manage human capital. The legislative changes reflected the two priorities of the government in the reform of the active employment policies. On the one hand, the establishment of a catalogue of services for citizens, which will be common for all the public employment services, to guarantee in all the State the access in equal conditions to a public and free-of-charge service of employment and to employment itself. On the other hand, the development of a model of personalised attention to unemployed people based on an individual and personalised itinerary of employment to get support and attention from the public employment services in their job seeking. Together these measures reflected the priority to implement active employment policies for those who need special attention.

The intention was deep transformation of the present programmes on active employment policies and the redefinition of its content and development to be more useful for unemployed people. It identifies the different fields for the active employment policies which have to be covered by the Autonomous Communities, answering to their particular necessities and circumstances, to achieve not only the final objectives but also specifying the tools to be used. Moreover, it is detected as an evolution of the concept of programmes which moves towards services to citizenship and enterprises, overcoming the present limitation in the management of the active policies of financial aid.

In this sense, labour leaves are a right for workers who can use it to facilitate their labour market transitions. Years of leave are considered as seniority so workers can claim for their right to attend training during it. However, leave for taking care of children is only given in case of birth, or adoption. The maximum duration of leave is three years and it computes as seniority, contribution and

attending of training courses. The re-entry is guaranteed with the first year being in the same workplace or with an equivalent category. Some collective bargaining has improved these conditions and foresees their automatic return along the three first years.

Labour leaves to exercise administrative or trade union functions are also given or when trade union functions have to be developed in the region or when being given administrative functions makes it impossible to do their normal job. Duration of the leave will last until these functions finish.

The next section presents data on the current employment/unemployment situation and how it affects a person according to the level of education they have. The situation of Spain in the European community constitutes an emblematic case in regards the percentage of people without a job. The economic crisis first manifested after 2007. At that moment, the unemployment rate fell from 8.5% in 2006 to 8.2% in 2007, presenting the lowest unemployment rate since the last crisis at the beginning of the 1990s. In 2008, when the economic crisis started the unemployment rate rose by 11.3%. It continued to rise year by year until reaching the current levels of unemployment that in 2012 represent, according to the EPA ⁽¹⁹⁾ (Spanish survey of active population) 25.03% of the population in their working years. This is the highest percentage in all the Euro Area ⁽²⁰⁾. In regards to age levels and higher unemployment rates, it is young people who are experiencing the highest rates of unemployment. Specifically it is the age level that comprises people from 16 to 29 years old. The age level that goes from 16 to 19 years presents the highest unemployment rate within the country, reaching 72.6%, while those aged 20 to 24 presents an unemployment rate of 49.1%. As age increases, the unemployment rate starts to diminish, reaching in the age level that goes from 25 to 29 years a rate of 32.2% in 2012.

In relation to the training of unemployed people, the EPA (Spanish Survey of Active Population) shows that the higher the educational level, the lesser the unemployment rate that affects the population. Thus, people with university education without including people with a doctorate degree present an unemployment rate far below the average of the whole country, reaching a rate of a 15.2% in 2012. In contrast, as the unemployment rate diminishes, the unemployment rate comes closer and surpasses the average of the state in 2012. Thereby we have, for example, workers without any kind of training who have the highest unemployment rate in the state, constituting more than half the

⁽¹⁹⁾ EPA, encuesta de población activa serie 2005-12: www.ine.es.

⁽²⁰⁾ Eurostat statistics:
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics

population in that category, having a 54.1% rate of unemployment for both sexes. Furthermore, a group of people that has an unemployment rate far above the national average is the group of people who only have primary education. This group reaches a level of 37.5% for both sexes. Likewise, we can see that as the educational level increases, the unemployment rate starts to diminish, according to data provided by the EPA. In contrast, the unemployment rate for both sexes of those with completed secondary education is at 27.19%. All the same, if people with doctorate studies is taken into account, the EPA shows that the levels of unemployment only reaches a rate of 4.69% for both sexes. In this sense, the data points out that education and education qualifications reduces the risk of unemployment and acts as a better support for labour transitions and also reduces the risk of social exclusion.

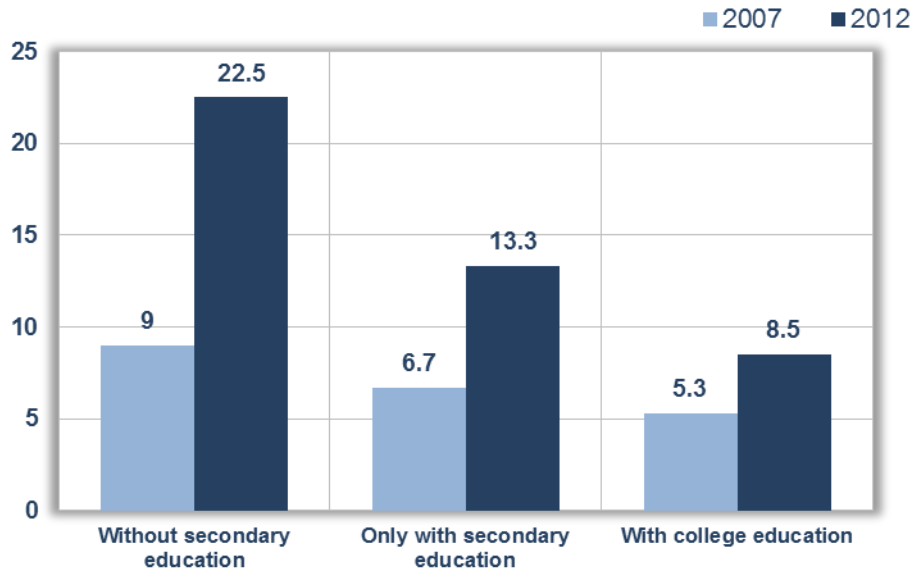
According to the data provided by the public service of State employment (SEPE), in March 2012 the number registered as unemployed was 4 750 867 people – 2 371 782 men and 2 379 085 women. This represent according to the data of the National Institute of Statistics (INE) collected in the labour force survey an unemployment rate of 24.44% and an activity rate of 59.94%. Unemployment has particularly affected young people in Spain with an unemployment rate over 50%, the highest one in Europe ⁽²¹⁾.

The sectors with the highest unemployment rates are services (2 819 402 unemployed people and 3 627 624 seeking a job) and the building sector (810 375 unemployed people and 958 969 seeking a job). The highest number of unemployed are men and women between 25 and 44 years (1 225 872 and 1 255 721, respectively). However, the increase of unemployment among people over 44 years from 2007 is at a rate of 170% for men and 89% for women.

The data provided by SEPE which relates to the level of education indicates a total of 876 220 people with post-secondary studies who are looking for a job in Spain. Of them, 320 710 are men and 555 510 are women. Of those, 653 257 are unemployed, so that means that 222 963 people in the labour force and with post-secondary studies state their wish of making a labour market transition. In the case of people with secondary studies the proportion is even higher. 4 160 791 people with secondary studies are seeking a job; 3 162 090 of them are unemployed so around a million of the workforce with secondary studies are seeking a labour market transition.

⁽²¹⁾ Eurostat statistics:
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics

Unemployment rate in Spain (2007-12)



5.3. Methodology used in the study

Before undertaking the biographical interviews the Spanish team reviewed relevant legislation, and looked at data on the labour market, employment and unemployment and literature in the field. The field work was conducted in two phases of interviews. In the first phase 26 people were interviewed and 12 in the second phase. This selection was undertaken following the general objectives of the project so that the selected people meet the requisite of labour transitions that are accompanied by learning experiences. Among the 26 selected people there is a diversity of profiles as regards age, gender, ethnic group, educational level and labour situations (people that work in private companies, people that work in health institutions, businessmen and people that work for the public administration). In relation to age we divided the sample into two age ranges. The first goes from 35 to 39 years and the second from 39 years to 45. Apart from age ranges, we have divided the sample between men and women trying to equal the number of cases per gender, as we explain in the following table.

In relation to the educational level there are participants with university education, participants with vocational training, people who are currently doing a university degree and people who are preparing for the exam of access for older than 25 to university. This has allowed us to reflect more widely the link between learning and labour transitions. For instance, within the group of those who are currently studying, people value a lot the knowledge acquired through work before their university studies.

Chart of distribution of the participants by age

Women		Men	
Younger	Older	Younger	Older
Saray (35)	Pilar (39)	Fernando (36)	Alberto (39)
Ana (35)	María (39)	Javier (38)	Marc (39)
Sandra (35)	Laura (39)	Eric (38)	Toni (42)
Cristina (35)	Rosa (42)	Juan Carlos (38)	Oscar (42)
Ariadna (37)	Elena (44)	Oriol (36)	Sergi (44)
Lourdes (35)		Eduard (36)	
Rocío (35)		Miquel (35)	
Verónica (35)			
Laia (35)			

For the sampling stage a list of relevant institutions and organisations were identified and contacted for potential participants. In total 25 institutions and organisations were identified. These included trade unions, employment offices, adult learning schools and vocational educational training schools. The project aims were explained to both the organisations and the participants. Interviews were carried out either at CREA ⁽²²⁾ at the Mundet Campus of the University of Barcelona or in other settings depending on the wishes of the participants. All the interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and then transcribed.

The technique of data collection used in the field work has been the in-depth interview. Through open-ended questions, we have tried to give interviewees the chance of reflecting deeply on their labour transitions and learning. Many of the interviewees were surprised by the information required as they considered their labour transitions to be normal. Following the Critical Communicative Methodology, we have tried to break the methodological gap and allow for an egalitarian dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee to build the interpretation and the scientific knowledge.

For the second round of interviews, we selected 12 case studies. This selection was undertaken once we had completed all the first round of interviews and had the interview transcripts. This enabled us to better identify the cases where one can see a greater relation between learning and the labour transition. This second round has led to the preparation of 12 guidelines for different interviews, so as to explore some specific aspects in greater depth. The preparation of the 12 guidelines was done considering three elements:

- the information obtained in the first round of interviews;
- the agreements of the Cedefop team in Venice;
- personal stories of the interviewees in conjunction with the objectives of Cedefop.

⁽²²⁾ Centro especial en teorías y prácticas superadoras de desigualdades [centre for research on theories and practices for overcoming inequalities].

For the second round of interviews we contacted the interviewees either by phone or by e-mail. Most of them agreed to do the interview without hesitation, but for a small group there were some difficulties in doing the interviews. When making contact with the interviewees for the second time they stated that they had already given all the information possible and felt that they could not further deepen on it. Nevertheless, once we justified the second round to them and explained that we wanted to go deeper and explain the interpretations done in the first round, the interviewees felt that their transitions, and in turn their own lives, were somehow successful and that many of them had not realised that until that moment.

For the analysis of the interviews in the first round of 26 interviews, the first step is doing the textual transcription of the interviews. Once transcribed, we proceeded to the analysis with the software Nudist for qualitative information, following the categories of analysis shared by all the European team. After this analysis, we wrote the summaries, following the guide prepared by the coordinators of the project. For doing the analysis of the second round of interviews, we have just transcribed aspects of the interviews that are relevant for the research objectives and for improving the summaries of the 12 people selected in the first round of interviews.

5.4. Summary of the profiles selected for the study

Chart of biographic summary

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Relational status	Employment status	Highest qualification	Current employment
Saray	F	35	Married	Two jobs part time. They sum up a full-time job.	Student of psychology	Administrative in a hospital and consultant on funeral services
Fernando	M	36	Single	Regular, full-time	Student of an undergraduate degree in engineering of construction	Draftsman. He works in an architecture studio, what allows him to finish his studies in engineering
Javier	M	38	He lives with a partner but he is not married	Regular, full-time	VET in electronics and mechanics	Caretaker in a public school
Eric	M	38	Unmarried, living with a partner and his kid	Regular, full-time	Degree in Education	High School Teacher
Ana	F	35	Married with no children	Regular, full-time	VET in administration. Undergraduate studies in statistics, yet to finish	Laboratory Technician
Juan Carlos	M	38	Single	Regular, full-time	Secondary compulsory and postcompulsory education. Degree in Telecommunication, not finished	Project Manager
Sandra	F	35	Single	Regular, full-time	Secondary post-compulsory education. Technician in Integration. Student of undergraduate studies	Social Educator and Trainer in a youth centre.
Pilar	F	43	With boyfriend, not married	unemployed	VET in administration	Administrative assistant and accountant
Oriol	M	36	He lives with a partner but he is not married	Regular, full-time	Higher level VET in analysis and development of computer applications.	Senior Technician in telecommunications
Eduard	M	36	With girlfriend, not married	Regular, full-time	VET in electronics. Student of Social Education.	Social worker
Marc	M	39	Cohabiting with his couple. His girlfriend mother's is in charge of them	Part-time	Primary education. VET in electronics not finished	Professor in electricity

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Relational status	Employment status	Highest qualification	Current employment
María	F	39	She is married and living with her partner and their son	Regular, full-time	Higher level VET in children's education. Student of an undergraduate degree in children's education	Pre-primary teacher
Laura	F	39	She is divorced. Now she has a partner and they are living together. She has 3 sons	Regular, full-time	Undergraduate degree in Special Education. Student of masters' degree in education research	Special teacher
Cristina	F	35	Single	Regular, full-time	Undergraduate degree in law	Political adviser
Rosa	F	42	Married, without children	Regular, full-time	Journalism and advertising. Public Relations	Human resources administrator
Ariadna	F	37	Married	Part-time and Lawyer freelance	Undergraduate degree in law. Masters' degree in management of non-profit organisations. Masters' degree in mediation and conflict resolution	Lawyer
Lourdes	F	35	She is divorced and single. She has two daughters	Regular, full-time	Undergraduate degree in Humanities. Undergraduate studies in psychology and psicopedagogy. Postgraduate in mediation.	Educational Psychologist
Elena	F	43	Married. She has a son	Regular, full-time	Postcompulsory education and exam of access to university. B2 level in French and English.	Caretaker
Rocío	F	35	Single	Regular, full-time	Nursing	Nurse
Miquel	M	35	Married. Married. He has a son	Regular, full-time	Nursing	Nurse
Toni	M	42	Married, living with his wife and his two children.	Regular, full-time	Undergraduate degree in law	Lawyer
Oscar	M	42	Divorced. He lives with his partner and with his partner's two daughters.	Regular, full-time	Undergraduate degree in psychology	Policeman
Veronica	F	35	She lives with her partner but she is not married	Regular, full-time	Undergraduate degree in psychology	Building Self employer
Sergi	M	41	Married. He has a son	Regular, full-time	Social Education	Human resources administrator
Laia	F	35	Single with partner	Currently as a part time media manager in stake-boarding firm.	Journalism	Journalist

5.4.1. Sample description

Synthesis Tables

Women		Men	
Younger 35 - 38	Older 39 - 44	Younger 35 - 38	Older 39 - 44
1. Saray	8. Pilar	2. Fernando	9. Alberto
5. Ana	13. Maria	3. Javier	12. Marc
7. Sandra	14. Laura	4. Eric	22. Toni
15. Cristina	16. Rosa	6. Juan Carlos	23. Oscar
17. Ariadna	19. Elena	10. Oriol	25. Sergi
18. Lourdes		11. Eduard	
20. Rocio		21. Miquel	
24. Verónica			
26. Laia			

Person		Area
1. Saray	(2)	Administrativa hospital/Servicios Funerários
2. Fernando	(2)	Delineación/Arquitectura
3. Javier	(2)	Funcionário público (conserje)
4. Eric		Profesor de secundaria (idioma)
5. Ana	(2)	Técnica de laboratório
6. Juan Carlos		Project Manager Multinacional (departamento I+D) Maquinas recreativas
7. Sandra		Educadora Social
8. Pilar	(2)	Administración/Finanzas/Contabilidad
9. Alberto		Persona con trastorno psicótico (trabajos adaptados)
10. Oriol	(2)	Informático en empresa multinacional de telecomunicaciones
11. Eduard	(2)	Educador social
12. Marc		Profesor de secundaria (electricidad)
13. Maria		Profesora de danza
14. Laura		Profesora de educación especial
15. Cristina		Asesora política
16. Rosa	(2)	Administradora de recursos humanos
17. Ariadna		Abogada. Apoyo a empresas de 3er sector
18. Lourdes		Psicopedagoga. Asesora de lengua, interculturalidad y cohesión social del departamento de Educación (gobierno catalan)
19. Elena	(2)	Auxiliar de Servicios. Conserje UB. Funcionariado
20. Rocio	(2)	Enfermera. Responsable de ensayos clínicos. Hospital
21. Miquel		Enfermero. Coordinador de Enfermos de Unidad de ensayos clínicos. Hospital
22. Toni		Abogado. Empresário
23. Oscar		Mosso d'esquadra (policia catalana). Funcionário. Profesión anterior: psicoterapeuta
24. Veronica	(2)	Agente inmobiliario. Empresaria
25. Sergi	(2)	Auxiliar de Servicios. Conserje UB. Funcionariado
26. Laia	(2)	Periodista and social manager

(2) = second interview

5.5. Thumbnail sketches

ID	Synopsis
EM_1	Her educational and working transitions have directly improved her professional and family situation. Her working transitions were not motivated by personal reasons, but by external ones: end of contract, economic crisis, etc. However she was always used to changes because all of them were motivated in her dream to allow her improve her working and personal life. Her most important educational transition was her access to the university after being unemployed. In this moment her main intention was to be able to become a psychologist in the near future, or to find something so she will be able to use her knowledge that she acquired in her studies.
EH_2	His work and learning transitions have always been guided by his personal motivations and interests. In this sense, his work transitions have depended on himself, but has been favored by some external conditions (change of direction in the company). His learning transitions were also aimed to increase his personal motivation. These were made possible thanks to taking appropriate decisions: start with his studies as a draftsman and then access to university studies. In this moment, he is finishing his degree in construction engineering, while working in an architectural firm, but his intention is to work part-time as a draftman, to conciliate his labour and personal life, because he's also devoted to music.
EH_3	His work and educational transitions have been aimed at improving his professional and personal situation. In this sense, his job transitions have been made thinking about what interested him more and the conditions of future employment. His educational transitions have been closely related to his career transitions, because to access to the jobs that he has had, he had to be academically prepared to pass the tests and other examinations. There is an educational transition that he has not started yet but that in the future he wants to do it: to access to university, as he has passed the tests.
EH_4	His transitions were always devoted to improve his employability. Having a foreign university degree, he needed to get a certification in Spanish and Catalan, to validate it. In relation with his working transitions, he was always looking for a job which will make him able to work and have a personal life to improve his language skills or his knowledge and abilities. In relation with his academic transitions, he had always been affected by his working experience, due to the fact that his major academic transition was to obtain certificate of Catalan and Castellán language, to be able to work in Catalonia as a teacher. Literacy proficiency was crucial, not only as a way to validate his degree, but also to improve his employability.
EM_5	All her working and educational moves were due to personal motivation, and she said that 'I always want to learn more, I don't like being static'. Her working transitions were oriented to learn new things and increase her abilities and knowledge in cytology and pathologic anatomy. Her academic transitions have been totally influenced by her interests and personal motivations. She has been always changing, to acquire necessary academic knowledge to be able to continue as a professional in those positions that she prefers, and in those that suit her more.
EH_6	His working transitions have been closely connected to his training, because acquiring titles had allowed him to be promoted within the company. His professional career is significant, due to the fact that he started as a plain worker in the factory and then he was promoted up to Project manager in the department of post-sales. He conducted his educational transitions to improve his professional career. He had studied a VET course, to be able to work in the factory. He started to study at the university (and in addition he took also language courses) to promote in the department of post-sales. Actually, he decided to start a new academic transition, and when he finishes he will make a new working transition.
EM_7	Her transitions have always been the result of an attempt to find her place, feel good about herself. Her working transitions have responded to the desire of improving her working conditions. Her educational transitions have been oriented to improve her knowledge and abilities, to do her job better.

EM_8	Her main transitions in terms of employment were motivated for crisis periods (1990s and 2008 up until now). Regarding her working transitions in between crisis periods, she used to move from one employment to another to improve her working status. In the periods of crisis she was always fired. She made a transition also when a fusion of her company with another occurred. Her transitions made her learn the reality about the possibilities and opportunities. Thanks to her studies in VET she could change jobs and improve her situation. Now she is trying to improve her English fluency, while she is studying to obtain a degree in labour relationships.
EH_9	
EH_10	His transitions have always been a personal choice and have not been sudden. In relation to his job transitions, A. has always changed his jobs to improve his working conditions (category, salary, hours, etc.), and has made them after having the working experience and training needed to assume his new job responsibilities 'to continue advancing in my knowledge and in my professional life, ok? So I have always wanted to progress a bit more and more' In relation to his academic transitions, we should say that they are closely related to his career transitions. Thanks to the continuing training funded by the ESF he has been able to improve his employability and training and thus be able to apply for better jobs. He has always been the one in deciding to make this academic transitions aimed at being promoted. Currently he is studying to take the university access exam for people over 25 years to obtain the degree in Telecommunications. He wants to do that as a way of improving his working category, his schedule, etc.
EH_11	His working transitions have always improved his economic and personal situations. In his jobs (before his university studies), his motivation was to have better working conditions and payment. However when he realised that those kinds of jobs did not enable him to achieve fulfilment, he decided to start his academic transition more relevant: access to the university to learn social issues to work in that field. In relation with his educational transitions, he met a lot of friends who were studying the same (VET), but he realised that this was not what he wanted. It took nine years for him to go through the transition. His principle motivation was that he wanted a job that he really would like, in the field of social issues.
EH_12	His transitions have been according to the given circumstances. Regarding his labour transitions he has been affected by the current economic crisis, as his main transition was to stop working on his own as an electrician in construction and to access education in 2009 (the beginning of the crisis). Concerning his academic transitions, they were related to improving his education and employability. Achieving the High School degree, as well as passing the exam to access the university was aimed at improving his knowledge and skills (employability). It is also noteworthy that his academic transitions were aimed at having the possibility to change the labour sector, because he thinks that in the construction sector as an electrician he won't have job opportunities for a long time (past the crisis).
EM_13	Her working and academic transitions are profoundly linked. Since she was a child she wanted to study things that she was interested in, like the school of arts. In relation with her working transitions she had been able to study with things that were linked with her interests, such as children or dancing. Her work changes were to improve her personal situation (hours of working, salary and everything according to her personal motivation.) In relations with her learning transitions she always did them to be able to work where she wanted to. All the training she decided to start was to be able later to work on it (cinema, VET childcare). She decided to access the university because her truth passion are children and her objective is to become a Primary teacher.
EM_14	Her transitions have been no coincidence, but the result of conscious decisions made to meet her goals. Regarding her work transitions, she has been changing her professional situation depending on her interests or her needs, for instance reducing her working hours in the store to do more hours as a school lunch assistant. Regarding her learning transitions, she has always been guided by her personal motivation, to the extent that leaving her studies when she was 19. Furthermore, after finishing her studies in special education, she wants to keep on studying, to improve her professional status and work in the education field.

EM_15	Her transitions have been made to improve her professional career. In relation to her labour transitions, changes have been aimed at improving her professional experience, however, she has also looked for a good working environment. Her academic transitions are closely related to her professional progression. The continuous training that she has decided to do, both within the political party and within the city council, has been aimed at obtaining more professional achievements and more responsibilities and political positions.
EM_16	Her work and educational transitions have been aimed at the professional and personal improvement. Regarding her job transitions, she decided them always with an attitude of opportunities and expectations for improvement. In this sense, she has always had an open mind to learn in the workplace and thus to take on new roles and challenges. Regarding her educational transition, she has had a continuous trajectory reaching higher education: Bachelor of Journalism. However, in the workplace she learnt the acquisition of skills and knowledge such as notions of law, economics, communication skills and emotional control among others. The work environment has offered training to her. She highlights language courses (Italian and English) and a master of public relations. Her intention in the future is to acquire greater responsibilities and keep learning.
EM_17	Her transitions have been touched by her self-improvement and personal motivation attitude. Regarding her job transitions, she has always looked at working on her own, without depending on other people. She wants to create self-employment drawing on her qualities. Her job transitions have been touched by time periods of instability, but all of them have successfully concluded. Her learning transitions have been very connected to her working career, since training is a crucial fact for transitions according to her. In fact, her learning transitions would not have been possible if she had not received previously the specific training to assume the responsibilities of her new job.
EM_18	Her transitions were made in search of new challenges and economic and professional stability. Regarding her work transitions, the most important one was when she started working in the public schools. With that transition she aimed at stability and a secure professional position that she liked, and at the same time she was challenged and got to know diverse realities related to her profession. She was also looking for having the doors opened and having more possibilities in her labour sector. Regarding her academic transitions, she has decided on the transitions to achieve her goal to work as an educational psychologist. Currently she states to be in a moment of transition, since she is planning to start superior studies to specialise on educational psychology.
EM_19	Her transitions were always difficult; she left many companies because of problems with the managers or because of personal situations. In relation with her working transitions, she has been fired or she has lived in violent situations (mobbing), although she always has tried to look for emotional and working stability. Because of that, she used to leave very soon from this kind of jobs. We can say that although her working transitions were very opportunistic, thanks to them she improved her situation, and she increased her motivation and emotional stability. Her learning transitions were made to improve her professional background, so she will be able to work where she wanted. However, her jobs did not match with her learning background, so she had to do additional training in her jobs positions.
EM_20	In her transitions she was always searching what she really liked and was interested in. In relation to her working transitions she was always searching what she wanted, whether stable or not. Her jobs were fulfilling her interests, her motivation and future. All her transitions had a complicated start and were traumatic on a personal level. Her knowledge transitions have always focused on what she wanted, before and after the jobs. She comments that the most important education that she acquired was the working experience.
EH_21	His transitions always have been progressive, never abruptly. In relation to his job transitions, he emphasises that he has made them always looking for his dreams, doing what he really desired, also with the goal to further learn and acquire more background. Regarding his school transitions, these were always closely connected to his working experience, since the more important school transitions he made was to improve his job position, to have more skills or because of having a better knowledge about his job contributions.'

EH_22	His educational and professional career, are characterised mainly by their continuity. He studied the compulsory secondary education, holds a university degree in Law studies. After that he did different specialising classes and seminars to be always up to date. For other reasons, he started a second degree at the National Distance Education University for his personal enrichment which is not linked to his profession, Philosophy and Literature. He hopes to continue in the future. This aspect highlights his will for learning because of his strong curiosity. Concerning his working transitions, he had two relevant jobs related to his studies. One in a lawyer's office for six months where he was given the opportunity to learn how an office works, and he left this job to establish an own lawyer's office, where he is still working and which is successful until now (for 18 years.) In that transition he developed an optimistic thinking, and the attitude to solve difficulties. During his professional career, and in this second job, he acquires a wide range of abilities and competences in a non-formal educational context. His intention for the future is to maintain his company project, and to get involved with other companies and scientific projects.
EH_23	His educational career is marked by continuance. However, he has experienced several professional transitions. Regarding his compulsory education he has passed the A-Levels and achieved the degree in psychology. From his work experience he has acquired different skills. Some of them in a formal context, such as the specific training courses, and some others directly come from his work experience. Concerning his professional career, the several changes are outstanding. During his compulsory education he has done some temporary and half-time jobs, such as as a supervisor in summer camps or as an educator in residences for minors or people with disabilities. In the last year of the university degree he does his internship (unpaid) in a social entity, which provides him with great work experience for his future jobs. His first paid job, which was more oriented towards psychological attention, was in a residence for people with intellectual disabilities as a substitute for a maternity leave for seven to eight months. As the contract finishes he is unemployed for a short time (three months) until he starts working in another entity, first, as an educator for a small group, and later, he does the psychological attention for the people of the institution. After three years he decides to have another labour transition because he was in disagreement with the person in charge of the institution, but the main reason was his emotional exhaustion. He decides to do this transition after three years because he has another job offer in a residence for people with intellectual disabilities. In this job he is in charge of three institutions and the psychotherapy for the end users. He likes his job but after three years due to financial difficulties of the entity he decides to be paid off and dismissed and back to being unemployed. He is looking for a job related to psychotherapy but as he cannot find any he decides to refocus his professional career and obtain more labour stability and security, even though he has to give up to a certain extent his initial professional idea. He passes the public exams and starts at the Catalan Police, where he still works at present. During the eight years working at the police he manages to relate his work with his professional profile in psychology and training.
EH-24	Her learning and work transitions have been oriented to personal autonomy, so she could combine university education with self-support (she pays her studies, became independent, pays her driving license, etc.). Regarding work, she has developed nine different jobs, among which she highlights her work at a telecommunications company for four years, which has constituted a main learning experience, as well as her current occupation as manager at a real estate agency. There has been a progressive improvement in her working conditions and salary, and increased responsibilities. Regarding education and training, she completes high school while working, and after that she does a degree in Educational psychology. During her career, she takes additional training courses: languages (English and Italian), management courses, group dynamics, human resources, etc. Her attitude towards learning is active, resolute, proactive, which is highly appreciated by companies. Finally, she starts different entrepreneurship projects. She's currently combining one of these projects with her personal life (for seven years).

EH_25	His labour transitions and educational transitions have been guided to achieve his professional studies, as well as better labour conditions. His labour path has been highly diverse, in the type of jobs developed. His main objective was to obtain a degree and since he was a teenager, besides the difficulties of learning he had in this period, he always searched the possibility to enter the university. J. considers he has developed an unclear labour profile since he has worked in diverse positions. His labour transitions have been mainly marked by this search of labour opportunities allowing him to study a degree, better schedules and personal relationships, as well as conditions to allow him to hold good health. On the educational transitions, those have not had a continuous path to achieve his desired university studies, but he has persevered, in a permanent way, in searching opportunities to achieve his higher education. He had an important period of training when he worked in SEAT, in which he tried to use the training related to management issues, quality and administration. He took courses in different languages, but he recognises himself as self-taught on the topic. Currently he continues seeking a labour change, since he has a professional qualification as social educator, his job is not related to his degree. In the labour and educational area he has always had an attitude of fight and perseverance, highlighting the development of communicative abilities and adaptation, as well as the implementation of strategies to solve difficulties and face different situations. J. considers he has developed such abilities from his labour experiences, associating some of them to the courses received in SEAT, mostly the ones in management of quality and ISO.
EM_26	Her career path has two different parts. First, when it has been oriented to journalism (in different media). The second one, recently, it is also related to communication, but in the field of social media. This change has been motivated by her desire to reach a good work-life balance. Regarding the first stage, some progressive transitions took place (from her combination of different jobs to her decision to slow down her workload). In the second stage, she heads to social media field. In terms of training, she has combine work and studies in different moments, with different postgraduate studies related to her degree in journalism/communication and English courses. She considers that these courses have been very useful for carrying out her different jobs and for acquiring new competences.

5.6. Case studies

In this section a summary of six case studies are presented. Through these case studies we want to show how there is a link between labour transitions and learning in each biography.. The selection of the six case studies was motivated by a selection of cases where we can identify more clearly the correspondence between the labour transition undergone and the processes of learning (both in the formal and the non-formal context). All of them were interviewed twice. Most of them have labour transitions supported by training and they have been somehow successful. Some of them are influenced – although to a different extent – by the context of the economic crisis that the Spanish State lives in since 2008.

In all the cases education plays a really important role, whether it be university studies, language courses or preparation for civil service examinations. Others, in contrast, have achieved their current jobs and have decided to study at university. For instance, some of them have decided to change, even if there is pressure in their environment given the situation of the crisis. The crisis has also provoked the loss of jobs, which has led them to look for alternatives through

education. In this sense, in some cases we can see how the crisis affects their future transitions, leading them to look for job stability, what for some of the interviewees is synonym of getting a job in the public sphere because it provides more stability.

5.6.1. Eduard – Social worker

Eduard, a social worker, is 36 years old living in Barcelona with his partner. His story is given in the main report.

5.6.2. Saray – Hospital administrative and consultant for funeral services

Saray is 35 years old and works as an administrator in a hospital providing support in a bereavement care unit. Her story is given in Section 3.1.2 of the main report.

5.6.3. Javier – School caretaker

Javier is 38 years old and works as a caretaker at a state school. He is a public servant for the Generalitat de Catalunya (Catalonia's government) with a permanent contract working 36 hours per week. Javier has been in this post since 2009. He lives with his partner in Barcelona.

When Javier finished compulsory secondary education he took two VET courses (Automotive and machinery and tools). After finishing these courses at the age of 20 he started working in a factory. The job was not related to his VET training. This was because at that moment in his life he preferred to work at a factory because it was better paid and this was his priority: 'VET courses, what is bad is that you do not use the experience. With the pass of the time you realise that no, that they do not (these jobs) offer you good contractual and economic conditions, and therefore that working in a factory gives you more money.'

So he started to work as a machine operator in a factory. He worked there for nine years. For the first four years he was a machine operator. During the rest of his time there due to his working experience and all the competences he had acquired he got promoted and became the shift manager. He had considered leaving the factory but felt under pressure to stay: 'I wanted to do this change. But it was not possible. I can't I was working there for a long period, so really, I was in the factory, with the shifts, I was the manager of 15 persons. On the other hand, I was the union representative. so I was under pressure for people who were below [his category], and for people who were over me [his category]. It really was a mess; I was tired and I want to leave this job and it did not matter how.'

Due to the offshoring of the factory to the Czech Republic in 2004 he was made redundant and received some compensation from the company. Thanks to this amount of money and the unemployment benefit he obtained he was able to

start studying for the university access exam at an adult education school while he was unemployed. He was unemployed for one and a half years (aged 29-31 years). This experience was very positive for him because: 'You start to get academic skills again, some skills that you have forgotten and that you had left. And also the challenge that it involves, you get training, you take a very difficult exam as the one to access to university, and you challenge yourself. I don't know, it really gives you more confidence.'

While preparing for the university access exams for people over 25 years of age he got a job in a small editorial company doing layout tasks, management and other administrative activities. But the firm experienced some economic problems and had to cut expenses so after a year he was made redundant (32 years old). Then he started to work in the postal services substituting for another employee so he was on temporary contracts (for a period of two to three months). He heard about the job through other adult students at the adult education school. For a year he combined these temporary contracts with the unemployment benefit. After that he decided to leave the idea of accessing university even though he passed the university access exam because he had the chance to take the national examinations to become a civil servant for the national postal services. He took the exam to become a civil servant which he passed and at the age of 33 years he started to work for the postal services. Two years later the Generalitat of Catalonia (government of Catalonia) put out a call for public examinations to become a caretaker. Javier applied to take the public examination and again passed the exam. He changed jobs as he felt that there was going to be an uncertain future in the postal services. He left the postal services and began work as a caretaker at a high school (35 years old). Currently, he is still working at this high school and would like to get promotion: 'To get promoted in the Generalitat, eh? Yes, unless they cut the salaries and I could not continue, [...] I do not think in changing my job. Because having in mind the state of the private sector, who dares to change? The situation is very scary, very! Get promoted, yes!'

In the future, however, he would like to start his university studies, maybe in sociology.

5.6.3.1. *Significant work and learning transitions*

For Javier the most significant transition was leaving the factory which he found very hard and not fulfilling. He felt that every transition improved his life. 'I always got better and better [...] and I have improved my quality of life'.

5.6.3.2. *Linking transitions to work, learning and skill development*

He stressed that he learnt his main skills and abilities through being self-taught and through work practice. He is curious and able to undertake self-learning which

helped him to prepare for the examination to become a postman, and after that for becoming a public servant. Furthermore, he learnt to play the guitar and nowadays he is into photography also as a self-taught learner. He stressed that his sociability is an important characteristic. Thanks to this ability he became a union representative. He considers that this ability is also useful for his current job.

When the company increased its work-load the workforce increased too so the union was created. He decided to join it. During the first years he did not like the way in which the union was managed, and in the next elections he presented himself as a candidate. He was elected because he had been at the company for several years and knew a lot of people and also because he was liked.

Javier considers himself to be a hard worker and even though as a team leader he could delegate some tasks he did not do this. Furthermore, being a union representative he could have freed himself from some work but he never did. 'I was always thinking of keeping the team as cohesive as possible'. Even though he likes working he felt exploited sometimes. However he got rewards, because of the way he worked and his seniority. He was promoted to a leading position in the production area '(I was) hard worker, competent and I get on well with my colleagues, That's the reason for which I was promoted'.

In the past, he would have liked to have finished a sociology degree. However, nowadays he has rejected this possibility because of the personal costs in terms of time and money. Basically because he was constrained to choose a minimum number of credits, and he thinks that it is difficult to combine it with his job 'At my age I don't feel like doing this effort, I'm still interested (in sociology), but to be beaten and pay a lot of money, it doesn't make sense to me'. Even though he rules out the idea of going to university he wants to continue studying English.

5.6.3.3. *Linking significant learning experience to career and labour market transitions*

Since he left his former company, his main transition was to completely change his work field because he felt exploited. He liked being in the union, but it was hard because apart from being the union representative he was in charge of a team of 15 people. His promotion was due to labour mobility in the company. When he started at the company there were only a few employees. He started acquiring seniority so his supervisors considered that he was capable of becoming a team leader. This new position brought him new responsibilities in terms of production and in terms of pressures with his colleagues, but he recognised that these pressures were the result of his attempt to be a good leader. When there were problems in the group, he was the one to decide who

must assume the work. To handle these situations he worked hard assuming tasks that should be delegated as a way to avoid conflicts.

He likes his current job 'it is not the job of my life, but I feel comfortable there. Given the situation of the labour market I cannot change just like that'. He is currently planning for promotion in the Generalitat and will take another exam to thrive professionally. But in this moment he prefers to stay where he is, because it is a job where he does not feel exploited, as he was at the factory.

5.6.3.4. *Nature of support for most significant work and/or learning transition(s)*

Javier was supported by his partner and friends. He thinks that people need to be trained to be ready for transitions, either for changing your job or being promoted in the same company. In his case, transitions were not motivated by a desire of getting more money. It was because he wanted improvement in his life (in terms of quality). To better respond to changes during transitions he thinks that education is crucial to avoid failure.

When the factory closed he thought about staying in the same work field or whether to change. He talked about it with his partner and she encouraged him to make the change but he was concerned about not finding a job. 'I was motivated by work [...] If I don't find anything like this [...] I would be left stranded. It was a personal decision made with the help and support of my partner. This support was crucial.'

His social networks of friends were also important in getting the postal job. He tries to help other friends (passing information about jobs and so on) to get jobs. Support is very important and in his experience receiving information from friends is crucial. In terms of family support he considers that they gave him all their support, but it was merely testimonial (they could only encourage him to do what he wanted to). The support from his partner during the transitions was more critical.

5.6.3.5. *Future development: future plans, career and individual orientation*

The work experience in the factory was not very satisfactory, so he decided to change, and the first opportunity he got was working as a postman. The idea of changing was his motivation to study every day. He decided to look for a more comfortable job 'I don't want a job like this' (referring to his position in the factory). 'And now I feel calm', and comparing his situation with the Spanish labour market he considers he's lucky. The stability of being a public servant is an advantage, given the current instability of the labour market so he is not considering changing jobs. His principal goal so far is to professionally thrive in the Generalitat de Catalunya, which would mean higher income, given that stability is guaranteed at the moment.

Learning from previous changes and transitions and moving forward According to Javier anticipation is the best strategy for facing transitions. Someone who wants to make a transition must have clear goals and be brave. He feels that his learning experiences after leaving the factory have been helpful in getting better jobs. In this sense, his ideas are consistent with previous research in terms of work transitions (Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale et al., 2012). He feels that the fact of being hired was an opportunity to change. He still keeps in contact with his colleagues from the factory.

5.6.3.6. *Summary*

Javier's work and educational transitions have been aimed at improving his professional and personal situation. His educational transitions have been closely related to his career transitions, because to access the jobs he obtained he had to have passed particular exams. Learning is important to him and he enjoys learning and he has learnt to be an independent learner. Although he did not go to university as originally planned he may do so in the future but is giving priority to taking courses which are directly related to his career. Javier was able to make transitions which completely changed his career. Support from his partner was critical in enabling him to leave the factory and start a new career.

5.6.4. **Rocio – Nurse**

Rocio is aged 34 and works as a nurse at a public hospital. She is responsible for clinical trials and works from Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. She has worked at this hospital since 2011. She is single and lives in Barcelona.

When Rocio left school she started a foundation programme because she was certain that she wanted to study nursing. At the age of 18 she started at university studying nursing. During her studies she did not have any job to give full dedication to the classes. She finished her studies in 1999 when she was 21 years old and started a postgraduate degree in first aid. 'For me what I like most is the First Aid. Afterwards, when I finished classes, it was not a good time to look for work, so I decided to be well trained'. During her postgraduate studies she started working in different hospitals: 'I went to work in positions, a day here, the other day there, but nothing stable'. In the year 2000 (aged 22) she had a contract at a hospital. For a year she was working in different areas of the hospital substituting for other nurses. In 2001 (23 years), she was offered the possibility to work as a full-time nurse in the area of pediatric emergencies and she accepted. 'Then they called me from the Hospital of Can Ruti [...] in the beginning I was doing eight hours straight shifts, substituting the other nurses, until one day I was offered to go to the area of pediatric emergencies, and I liked it, I accepted'.

She worked for nine years in that job until 2010. Her contract for the first six years (2001-07) was for 14 hours weekly so she also worked in the First Aid centre Monday to Friday to complete 30 hours weekly: 'The bad thing is that in the hospital I was only working 14 hours, so as I could not live like that I went into the private sector doing First Aid. There I really started to use my knowledge about first aid, and gain contact with nursing, although I would like to work in public institution.'

At the age of 32 Rocio had a car accident and she could not work for some time. At the hospital they did not take that very well and they started questioning the contract so she decided not to go back to the hospital. Instead she started to work in a public centre for Primary Health Care This was a change that she always wanted to do. She stayed for a year (aged 33 years) at that centre: 'In 2010 I had a car accident and I had to rest. They told me that they wanted the contract to finish, and I have to wait [...] I took it really badly. They took it bad and I decided to search for a job in public Primary Health Care [...] I always wanted to work there but I never had a job. The situation was good for me to do the transition, they called me from the previous hospital to ask for my forgiveness.'

During that period she rejected two more stable working positions because she considered herself as being too young: 'They offered me another job which paid more and it was stable, but I rejected it. I was too young, and I was thinking that I have to learn more, and do not move so fast in a specialised sector [...] then they offered me another position in another centre. It was a very good offer also, but I thought the same, it was very early to have a permanent job, so I rejected it.'

At the age of 34 she was offered work in a private foundation against AIDS being responsible for clinical trials and she accepted. Rocio is still working in that job and she rejected a permanent position in public Primary Health Care: 'So they called me from there, I said then that I had no intention to move to another work place, but the conditions that they offered were interesting, I also liked the environment, it was interesting for my training, so I did another craziness and I went there.'

5.6.4.1. *Significant work and learning transitions*

For her the most important working transition was when she entered the private sector to become responsible for clinical trials because: 'It is very different. I am the coordinator, I check everything, from the beginning to the end, and it is rewarding because I am with the patients every minute – something that I did not had in other jobs.'

The most positive aspect of her transitions has been what she defines as 'you can do what you like, what you are offered to do'. She comments that the most negative aspect has been 'the feeling of insecurity [...] you are missing

something, you do not know exactly where you are going or what you want, it is strange’.

Working in the job that she is in now Rocio had a bad start ‘I, in the beginning, I was here when the crisis started. I was thinking about this job as the one that I wanted to do, I began to have my doubts of the possibility of stability in a public company, in a centre, I do not know’.

5.6.4.2. *Linking transitions to work, learning and skill development*

All the abilities and skills she has acquired have been through her job: ‘When you finish your degree, you have the knowledge but until you are in front of a patient for real and you are alone, until that moment you do not learn, you are not a nurse.’

Rocio also highlights that in the nursing world social skills are very important for which ‘you can be an excellent nurse in theory but in the practices you will have a lot of problems if you do not know how to sympathise with people, if you are not friendly, etc.’. One of her main abilities as her colleagues define her is the connection she has with the patients, because she has never had problems with children nor adults. Her social and empathetic character allows her to do her job with greater easiness than her colleagues. For that reason she knows this is an ability that makes her job much easier.

In addition she is very self-determined to undertake her transitions since she is a person that does what she considers convenient for her. She stated that she decides in an intuitive manner given that she searches for jobs that best suit her personal development and she considers herself a rational person. ‘I am very rational, but the intuition takes over me, it is something that I do not (control)’. On the other hand, she evaluates what is convenient for her according to the professional profile that she likes best being. On many occasions she has been very rational and cautious in the decisions that she takes as a professional.

5.6.4.3. *Linking significant learning experience to career and labour market transitions*

For her having access to the university was her most important academic transition. She recalls all her learning transitions with affection and she liked all of them ‘I do not have any bad experience from my times as a student’. I have always searched how to become a better professional through changes and learning transitions. The best of her learning transitions she feels has been ‘to be able to choose what you really want to do, what you really want to study’. The worst ‘finding out that many of the things that you study do not fulfill you [...] in fact I am a little disappointed with the lifelong learning in Spain, at least in nursing, I think they can teach more and better’.

When she undergoes her first transition she recalls that her priority was to feel accomplished but she did not know where she was aiming to go. 'For example I have colleagues that since they were at the university they knew what did they wanted to do and they have been years and years working on it'. She experienced this situation with dissatisfaction since she was expecting to feel comfortable in a certain position. She seeks labour stability which she has with the job now and she has discarded entirely to be waiting for a phone call to go to work as her earlier working years were and as happens in many public hospitals nowadays. There are people with a permanent job but she considers that there is not much difference between the public and the private.

Rocio started in the public sector and now she works in the private sector. She explained that when she worked for the public sector she was offered a permanent position which she rejected and went from working 40 hours to working 14 a week. She did that because she preferred to be relaxed on a shift of 14 hours than going from one department to another with a full time contract of 40. In addition her 14 hours contract gave her time to study and do other things that with a 40 hour contract she could not have done. She always knew that that this was not her final position but she was happy. She worked well but she did not see herself working there for much longer. She left the locum post to dedicate herself to what she does nowadays which is research. She says that many nurses would like to work where she is nowadays. But at that moment everyone was shocked by her decision because she was leaving the locum job to start in an unknown job '[...] When I changed, I was seeking to try new things and gain labour satisfaction and knowledge that would lead me to take the next step'. Nowadays she is the coordinator of the clinical trials and it is a job that she likes very much and she feels comfortable and she works hard. On the professional satisfaction level she thinks that currently it is where she has felt the most rewarded. Although she highlighted her other experiences because that was what she had to learn and her current job she finds it much more complete in professional terms.

5.6.4.4. *Nature of support for most significant work and/or learning transition(s)*

In her case she explained that she has missed having important role-models. Many times her family did not agree with her decisions since 'my family wanted me to have a permanent job from Monday to Friday and that's it'. Rocio explains that nobody advised her on her transitions and pointed out 'that I would have liked to have someone to talk to, but I understand that they have to be useful for what you need, but I also understand that not everyone can help you'. Although her family did not support her transitions they were not against it, simply they have a different way to live their life. 'The same as when I decided live in rented accommodation rather than buying a flat'. She felt that this fact of having her

parents giving their opinion differently to what she thought did not influence her because she did not pay attention to what they said. 'It is not that they did not support me but simply they recommended me what they thought was going to be better for me'. They told me things but underneath they supported me in all the decisions I took 'I had to fight against my family because for them they believe in finding a stable job and become a permanent worker. For them the concept of security is different to mine. For me it is working on something that you really like'.

She considers that she would have liked to have someone supporting her with her decisions: 'mostly because if you have everyone stating different to what you do you feel that you are doing something wrong'. She stated that she had support from people outside of her family. Her friends made her feel that she was not alone thinking different to her environment 'the best way of giving support is saying to trust on your beliefs'.

The most important thing when undergoing a transition is 'to know if this is what you want to do and if you are where you want to be'. From the transitions mainly there is an 'overall sensations of doubt that affects you emotionally. [...] in addition you lose security and you have the feeling that you start from 0'. Besides, she always searched for 'finding my place. Now I don't know if I found it, but I know that this is the place where I should be now'. For her the changes can be perceived in a subtle way 'somehow you know that you will make a change. The problem is the process, the time, sometimes you know it but you are not ready, but if you know it, you perceive it'. It is important for her, because that has worked for her: 'being intuitive, you have to follow your senses. It is important to find out if you were wrong or hurried. In addition, if you make a mistake, you are the one making the mistake, and maybe you should have done it [...] I am intuitive.'

5.6.4.5. *Future development: future plans, career and individual orientation*

One of her aims has already been accomplished which was to be able to work in the mornings with a schedule from Monday to Friday. She sees this schedule as being normal. But in addition she foresees that to: 'complete her cycles, she has a clear mind that when she feels that she should not be there anymore she will find something else although I would never go back to Primary Health Care. I think that I have always moved knowing that I was burning phases, I had learnt what I had to learn.'

For the future, she sees herself working in the same company for at least several more years because she still needs to learn lots of things. Besides, she does not know exactly where she will go or what she wants to do, therefore, she is comfortable where she is in her current company and in addition Rocio keeps

on having professional challenges and for the moment she sees herself working in the same place.

She has not abandoned the idea of becoming a writer. It is something that she would like to do but she does not know if she has the talent for it. 'I have looked at it, I have searched the courses but it is something that you have to dedicate time to. It is like doing a second degree if you want to do it right, and now I do not have the time'. This is not something to do professionally but something that she likes. She has put it aside for the moment as she feels that it is not the moment for it.

5.6.4.6. *Learning from previous changes and transitions and moving forward*

In terms of her job positions the most important has been 'being able to learn new things and to have a good team with whom you can work, and on that I have been fortunate, I cannot complain'. In her opinion 'transitions follow a pattern. In my case I have the feeling that I burn phases, that in that place I cannot learn anything else, then I decide to start taking steps to change'. Her strategy is 'to follow her intuition, when I feel that I don't have to be here anymore, I will leave'. If she had to give advice to someone in a transition she will tell them to 'be patient, don't be afraid of starting from zero, if this is what he or she really wants, patience and not being afraid for living this kind of crisis, to channel well their energies and fight for it'. Finally she explained that lifelong learning and specific training for nursing is vital since: 'on the one hand you have to take courses for gaining points and to get a permanent position, but in addition because medicine evolves very quickly, and you should be up-to-date, it is very important if not easily you are obsolete.'

In her current job she is very happy and learning a lot, because it is very different to her previous jobs. In addition she has always searched for a job that gave her more independence, and in her current job she has it. 'The truth was that at the beginning it was very difficult to work because it was very different to what I had done before. Here I had to learn not to have everything under control, this is a very different job'. She highlighted that she has much more stress now than before since before she had to cover certain shifts and that's it. On the contrary now, she has to fulfill her task and may have to stay more hours until she completes her job. Moreover this job is very important for her, since professionally she feels much more rewarded by having a more independent role and with greater responsibilities.

In addition in the company where she works offers a lot of continuous education, for example English courses. Rocio also explains that when she got the job they offered her computer courses. Another offer that the company does is provide grants for paying for a Masters'.

Although she highly values her university studies and her Masters', she stated that the continuous education has disappointed her because most courses are aimed at gaining points for a permanent job in a hospital. Therefore this is why she thinks that the informal learning is much more important for her professional career. She considers that the main learning element for her job is through her colleagues and the experience of doing her job. When she started she wanted to take a UVH course but her colleagues told her not to do it because she would learn more by working there 'and it was like that, I have learned a lot working, I have always learned a lot while working, more than studying'. She is still adapting to this type of job. 'I still have to learn a lot, because I only work on a type of pathology (hepatitis) and here we work in many others'.

5.6.4.7. *Summary*

In her transitions she was always searching for what she really liked, wanted and was interested in whether or not the situation was stable. Her jobs were fulfilling her interests, her motivation and future. All her transitions had a complicated start and were traumatic on a personal level, particularly as she did not get support from her parents. She also thinks that you need guidance to help you through a transition. She comments that the most important education that she acquired was the working experience.

5.6.5. **Sergi – University services assistant**

Sergi is aged 43, was married but now divorced with a son aged eight. He works in Barcelona as a Services Assistant at the University of Barcelona. It is a permanent post. He is 43 years old.

Sergi had learning problems at school and left secondary school as he failed the exams to obtain VET training. His family encouraged him to enter the labour market.

However his motivations for continuing studying led him find professional training and a job to be able to cover expenses. He started a labour path which was highly diversified with jobs related to services, selling and administration. Later he managed to have a steady job in a store selling perfumery and hairdressing products, and then he spent a long period of 10 years as a SEAT employee in the production area.

At the age of 21 when he finished his vocational training he tried to enter university. It was not until 14 years later that he completed his degree as a social educator. During this period he tried to enter several universities, including some that provide opportunities for adults over 25 years old. He achieved access to study Sociology at UNED (a distance university) where he studied for two years. He abandoned his studies due to difficulties with work schedules and fatigue and health problems. He later completed his degree studies in social education

because of his job in the public administration doing substitutions which financed him. Sergi has been evaluating the possibility of having more time to study rather than having a better salary.

Sergi took several courses at the SEAT Company which were mostly related to quality control, ISO, and management and computers. He stated that he developed many of his abilities and skills due to the experience accumulated in his work as well as the training received at SEAT. The job he conducted in commercial and administrative work involved dealing with many people, solving problems, searching strategies, implementing systems, and improving communication in other languages. Sergi did well in his jobs as a salesman and as an administrator. The transition to join the area of production at SEAT was marked also by the difficulty of getting into university which he hoped would provide better job opportunities. Despite the good salary earned at SEAT, and after having to abandon his studies in sociology at UNED, Sergi decided to request a leave of two years with the aim of finding a job that would allow him to study for a degree. This decision was also influenced by the fact that he did not have good relationships with his peers, his mechanical job, the rotating shifts and the impact that work was beginning to have on his health as he started to have anxiety disorders.

After two years of taking leave of absence he decided to return to SEAT as he was not accepted at any university and was not able to take the public examinations. He had applied to several municipalities. SEAT also paid well. He worked two more years at SEAT within the production area. He tried to get promoted to other areas but he did not succeed. When he left SEAT to do substitutions in the public administration he already had a son of four months old and was married. It was very important for him at this moment that the new job provided the opportunity for him to study for a degree. The transition to the public administration allowed Sergi to start and finish his degree as a social educator at the age of 35, and at the same time he achieved a permanent job position which allowed him to be a member of the services department at the university.

His current occupation at the University of Barcelona is as a services assistant. He gained this position after several transitions within the public administration, for which he participated in different public examinations until he was hired in a permanent position.

The reasons for making transitions were for finding the opportunity to combine work and studies, or to achieve better labour conditions. He stated that the various jobs involved being in relationship with many people which developed his communicative skills. Over the two years of extended leave of absence he experienced three jobs. He worked as a sales assistant in a high technology company for six months in which he had to use languages, as well as solving solutions he faced and the application of strategies of the quality norms of ISO.

He worked for a week as a truck driver for a food company but left the company immediately because of bad labour conditions. Later, he worked for nine months as a salesman in an of industrial oils company where he learnt communicative skills, organisational, management and adaptation.

He participated in public examinations to have a permanent position inside the public administration, but since he did not succeed he went back to SEAT when finishing his extended leave of absence. He left SEAT two years later, when the public administration called him to cover in a job because he had applied two years earlier to do the public examinations. The motivation to achieve better labour conditions as well as to combine job and studies influenced again his decision. In the same year he started to cover job positions in the public administration. He started his studies as a social educator at UNED. Three years later they offered him a permanent position in the public administration.

5.6.5.1. *Linking transitions to work, learning and skill development*

In terms of learning it has to be highlighted that Sergi acquired skills in several of the jobs he had, as salesman, trade operator and administrator. The skills he considers he has developed in these jobs are empathy, negotiation skills, the ability to solve problems as well as being able to develop work systems, and logistics management, and the ability of self-adaptation and self-learning in several topics, including languages. In addition, he shows abilities to solve problems and to find alternatives to new situations:

I remember I managed sales and quality issues, and all those chips are very expensive, and you buy them to Canada with VISA or Mastercard [...] there was disconformities of anagrams and many chips that were very expensive were wrong, These were in the warehouse and no one was paying attention to it; I will take care of it! They returned them to Canada and they will pay us.

He was self-taught in English. He use to grab dictionaries which specialised in letters, learned conversations and more or less use to ask them to speak more slowly.

Much of his learning he attributes to his own efforts without the help of companies or other colleagues. He stressed that he has developed greater skills than people receiving training: 'I was starting a job, and nobody had time to teach me, so I had to do it myself. [...] and when I was going to leave, there was another worker who use to do sales who asked me about my notes and he was receiving paid English lessons at ESADE. But I was going to be brilliant in English and other things'.

In several of the important job transitions for Sergi the environment and the labour relationships, as well as the type of people with whom he worked with were important reasons for those transitions: 'actually I was in search of something, but I saw a very posh environment of executives, where I felt I did not

match either, I was not at ease with the regular environment, or with people with low education, but neither with high qualified people who has a very personal look of their lives, in another line. [...] In production, where I was, I felt I did not connect with anybody, I was even isolating myself. At lunch time they use to see me as a freak, I did not feel well, I was well paid, but not feeling at ease. I was looking for a more secure job, where I could fit better'.

Sergi values the importance of achieving a goal as well as the search for paths to achieve them. This has influenced his job transitions as mentioned which have been marked by the search for conditions that would allow him to study.

5.6.5.2. *Significant learning and skill development*

His main skills are related to communicative skills that he acquired in his different tasks, especially those that are related to customer service. He highlights the communicative skills that he gained through working with people. He developed these skills mainly through the difficulty of selling encyclopaedias. This made him reinforce his communicative skills that he already had. He explained that he had and still has an ability to make a good impression on people. This helps him in dealing with other people. He stated that being the way he is has better outcomes than doing it mechanically. He tried not to be aggressive in sales because this approach usually did not get results: Those who tried to teach you in making sales, tried to make you do aggressive sales, fast sales, easy as 123, sign here and that's it. Well this sale does not get you loyal clients. It has a high percentage of people who then step back, people who realise that they have been manipulated. I don't know, I realised that showing myself as I am and giving an explanation, trying to give a positive explanation of the product, that way I had good sales.

Another aspect related to his skills is that learning is linked to resilience: 'I think that it is important to be bright and that resilience is important, to be, despite the wind against you, to say if I don't do that I'll do this, and I'll get along here and I'll find the way, you know, I'll find a way, it might be resilience in life in general, but in this labour context, I think it is totally, that, saying you never give up, to look for ways to continuously recycle. [...] It helped to break with ideas and concepts and ideas that I had of myself, uncertainties, now I am on a different level.'

He describes himself as a person with objectives: he knows what he wants and he works for it and spends all the time that is necessary to get it. Concerning the ambition to go for what he likes, he highlights education that one has received as an essential element. He stated that his parents took many risks with regards to the labour situation, such as migrating to Catalonia and then to Germany, even though they were very conservative in other aspects of their life.

He wanted to work in something different than a factory and he does everything he can to find the best way to achieve this. He thinks that it is due to this effort (of his parents), the ambition to find the best way to live was crucial to him. His decision to change his job, according to him, was motivated by an issue of principles. He did not like his job so he looks to for the best way to solve this issue. The best way to do it is the own initiative and to start preparing for the state examinations. You could say that he is a determined person, who knows what he wants and goes for it, even though it requires an effort. 'I have to leave, I don't mind whether I have a stable job, you have the proof for this in the fact that I took three state examinations, I changed my job with the unpaid leave, I've done courses to get out'.

5.6.5.3. *Linking significant learning experience to career and labour market transitions*

Even though he does not have the opportunities to make the changes that he was looking for in his work life, he is a person who looks for the opportunities or creates them. Hence, he tries with the state examinations and changes his job with the aim to create the opportunities that he was looking for and to feel much better in his job. The economic situation at the moment of his last transition is key as it allows him to take an unpaid leave of his job in the factory from which he wanted to leave. For now, he is not directly hit by the economic crisis. However, he feels that he needs to be more patient in this situation for work in the social area, as he is starting little by little in the field of social education.

Although now he is a public employee at the university, this is not his last wish. He appreciates the stability provided by the job as a public employee but he would like to change his job. However, this ambition depends on the current context of the economic crisis. The stability provided by his state employment helps him in his current personal situation, in which he has more responsibilities.

5.6.5.4. *Nature of support for most significant work and/or learning transition(s)*

Regarding the support received, he thinks that he did not have much support. He highlighted the lack of support provided by his family during his adolescence when he had problems with learning, as his father motivated him to abandon his studies. He was the one who decided to continue his studies and to do so on his own account: When I failed for the second time the last year of secondary education, my father told me, well get some work, and I said, dad, I know that I can study, I know that, and I'll pay for it and at the same time I found a job unloading trucks and therewith I paid for the books.

He also said that he did not receive any support or guidance in the educational environment to do his labour transitions: 'I basically think that at that moment, to me no one assessed my answer, there was no one interested in it, no

personal interviews. I went to study administration without really knowing what I liked'. When he talked about the guidance provided by the teachers he thinks that he did not receive any support either, but rather on the contrary they hurt his self-confidence: 'On the contrary, the teachers reject you, I was a good student, I had good grades'. He believes that it was very difficult to find a straight professional career: 'you do not end up having a specific profile, and I don't especially like administrative work, and then finally you find something after a long way and many years something that you feel comfortable with, and you see where you fit in'.

He stresses that it is necessary to fight for what you want, such as the self-confidence that evolves from the changes that you do: 'many people told me that it was very difficult to enter in the administration, and that only those people who were there would enter. But finally I said I'm going to enter, and I enter and that's it. [...] All this made me very self-confident, and I think that personally this struggle helped me a lot'. Regarding the support that he had received during his last labour transition, he stated that he did not have any support, even in the company where he was working previously 'in human resources they told me that I should consider this well, that I shouldn't leave. Of course I said no, that I would leave'. Regarding the support received by his family, he stated that they have been scarce or even non-existent. This might be due, as he explained, to the difficult situation that his parents had to grow up with – the post-war situation. For this reason he thinks that they did not support him in his last transition. However, he misses the support of his family and so he had to get used to not having it. He explained that it is like saying that you need support but if they do not give it you still continue with your aims: 'I didn't receive any support, it's more on the contrary, but I think I understand why they didn't support me, even my sister, in the previous company I tried to leave with an unpaid leave preparing for the state examinations [...] my sister told me to stop dreaming, that I wouldn't pass the examinations., that the best thing was to get back to the company that this was better than anything of what I was doing. I passed the state examinations.'

He stated that in the long term, however he had family support, but in the beginning when he really needed it, he did not have it.

5.6.5.5. *Future development: future plans, career and individual orientation*

He would like to work as a social educator and would like to use his university degree that he now has: 'I would like to be a social educator, to really be it, now I have the degree'. He would also like to work in prisons. He would also like to have a job where he could share his experience acquired over his professional career: 'I would like to transmit this experience'. This motivation arises from his internship: 'In the Centre for training and work motivation, I am working with women who receive social subsidiary, I'm going to do a workshop on social skills

and assertiveness and it will be very nice, and there I can transmit all this [...], I'll put some topics on the curriculum vitae in the workshop, on personal interviews and how we have to present ourselves, how can we get rid of stigmas. I think it will be very good to canalise all this in that way.'

For now he aims to stay in his current job as an administrative assistant but to look for a job related to his profession to combine the two. One strategy to reach this is using his personal contacts and being linked to the professional world, as he is a member of the association of social educators. Hence, he stays informed about: 'news, workshops, courses, job offers, it is a way to stay in touch with the world related to your profession, and from there you have some contacts here and some there, that's what I hope and to find a job for now, some mornings or at the weekends, because here I work in the afternoon.'

He thinks that he has reached an age limit that does not allow for big changes, so the important changes are of another priority, such as ensuring that the transition does not leave him without employment. He highlights that the current labour situation does not allow for taking risks due to the crisis of the labour market. However, he does not abandon his wish to work as a social educator of working some hours combining his current job and a hypothetical new job. This is his idea, and he is waiting for the crisis to become better and if new public employment is offered he would like to work in another institution such as a prison. He would be happy to work as a social educator and even though in some moment of his life he had left a stable job for another one today he does not consider this option, claiming that he is getting older (44 years) and that he cannot afford giving up a stable job. Moreover, being separated from his wife leads to additional responsibilities so that he cannot consider quitting a stable job 'I have my son, a pension, the rent, I cannot just jump in the water'.

'The idea is, as I have this stable job, not to quit, but to start getting into the world of social education little by little, doing some hours or something. This is the idea that I have more or less, find something to work some hours through the association, get connected to this world somehow. So the idea is to see whether I can do some hours in a prison to combine it with my job. So little by little to stick the head in this field and then make the step.'

He has a strategic profile, which can be proved by his desire to get out of his previous company in any case. He restarted his studies in administration and he got educated as fast as he could to get out of his company. He managed this and went back to university. This was what he had always wanted. He finished his degree in social education and he tried to get a job as a social educator. 'I had vocational training in administration and that was what I had to stick to. And that was the profile that I had to mould to get out of this'. He even explained that he tried to stay at SEAT as an administrative assistant, but they did not offer him this option. They even had vacancies that he could have filled but they told him that

they only took external people who met the requirements but no. According to him, they preferred to hire people from the outside for the vacancies that they had.

5.6.5.6. *Learning from previous changes and transitions and moving forward*

Based on his work experience and the long trajectory that he has followed to achieve a university degree, he thinks that it is very important to be self-confident and to take advantage of his experience that he has accumulated during his transitions, as well as to look for his own ways to advance: 'When you go to a job interview, that is where you learn by yourself. [...] When I was there I knew how I had to put my hands, how I had to look into the eyes, how to present myself as self-confident, although I was not. [...] All this trajectory and this itinerary made me change my personality and to believe in myself, take confidence and to love me, more than I did before.'

The effort, from the first moment, is another aspect that he appreciates: 'it might be that you are not in the right moment, but I from the first moment on I will make an effort'.

Even though he stated that during his last time in the company he had felt a distance towards his colleagues, this was not the final straw. As he said it was an issue of principles and the fact of knowing where one wants to be. While he was in the company he studied sociology and he quit because he felt that he would not complete it as it required too much attention and time. He decided to put the degree aside to continue with his studies in administration. He does so mainly to have a uniform professional profile as he had done the vocational training in administration. This decision was very utilitarian with a professional aim only, which was to get out of SEAT. During his leave he decided to take the state examination and meanwhile he was working in an editoria office. Once he is settled in his job he decided to restart his university studies but in social education. In his current job he sees that he has time to study and he was considering getting back to sociology but finally he decided to study social education because he wants to work with people.

Recently he has started a new degree as a way to continue studying. His idea is to combine the workshops in the field of social education and to not stop doing things for his personal enrichment. Life experiences, according to him are crucial. The fact of dealing with different kinds of people, the fact of having to struggle in life to him represents true learning and his real baggage. Nevertheless he highlights that the learning that he has done in his previous jobs is also important to him. The fact of working as a salesman, where he had to struggle provided him with different skills that you do not get in other kinds of jobs since the results depend much more on oneself as an individual. 'The fact of relating to people that you don't know at all gives you very important skills'. Thus, to him

informal learning is a crucial part of acquiring labour skills. He recognises that the fact of having worked as a salesman had facilitated him his work with students and teachers at the university.

5.6.5.7. *Other aspects*

He distinguishes his relationships with his colleagues in his previous job into two periods. The first one was positive. The second period is marked by some changes in the production area where he had to collaborate with colleagues that he did not like that much. For this reason little by little he started to distance himself from them: 'there was a first period that was very good, I felt very good with them, some had a degree and if they hadn't at least they had cultural interests. And there was another period when I didn't feel that well. The changes in the shifts affected my health and that was added to a moment when I felt I didn't belong there. They made comments about someone reading the newspaper. Saying like what are you up to, something weird. And I ended up bringing a book for lunch and eating all by myself.'

5.6.5.8. *Summary*

His labour transitions and educational transitions have been undertaken to improve his professional standing as well as to improve his labour conditions. His labour path has been highly diverse in terms of jobs. His main objective was to obtain a university degree which he had wanted to do since leaving school despite his learning difficulties.

His labour transitions have been mainly marked by his search for labour opportunities which would allow him to study for a degree, better work schedules and personal relationships, as well as conditions which would be better for his health. His educational transitions have not been a continuous path but he has persevered. He had an important period of training when he worked at SEAT, in which he tried to use the training related to management issues, quality and administration. He is continuing to seek another labour change into the field of social education. In the labour and educational area he has always had an attitude of fight and perseverance, highlighting the development of communicative abilities and adaptation, as well as the implementation of strategies to solve difficulties and face different situations. Sergi considers he has developed such abilities from his labour experiences, associating some of them to the courses received at SEAT; mostly the ones in management of quality and ISO.

5.6.6. Anna – Laboratory technician

Anna is 35 years old and has a permanent position as a laboratory technician in Barcelona. She is married with no children. Anna left school at the age of 16. She

then started a VET course in Business Administration as a way to access university studies in the future. At some point, she decided to begin a new pathway and learn something new at the age 18: 'And ok, there is a lot of work to do in the administrations but a lot of people do it too. So I said, 'ok, I have to do something else', and I said ok, 'let's go to university for Statistics, because I liked it'. I wanted to do mathematics but I couldn't access directly, because I only had a VET certificate, so I went into statistics, something I could do and that was interesting to me.'

During that period, she started other sporadic classes to earn more money in the future and undertook jobs which did not need special requirements. When Anna was 24 she decided to drop out of university (she had only two classes left to finish) due to a bad experience during her internship. As a result she decided that statistics was not what she wanted to do for the rest of her life: 'I liked the degree, I had practically finished it. I had only two classes left but I was let down. When you go to work you can use it for good purposes but it can also be used for bad things, and you can interpret your results as you like. I was doing an internship in a sociology company working with teachers' surveys from universities outside of Barcelona. Our work was to grade them according to the assessments made by students. Depending on the results, teachers could even lose their job. Of course, that was not good for the company because some teachers got really bad grades so they told us to modify the data to give them at least a minimum grade (7/10). I argued with my internship supervisor, because I wasn't going to do what he wanted. It was an issue that affected me directly because those surveys were the only tools that students had to assess their teachers and that was what frustrated me that much; so I said 'well I don't want to waste any more time here'.'

At that moment Anna decided to do a 'restart' and study a VET programme in something interesting to her. She had been always interested in the area of natural sciences so she decided to study a VET programme in pathologic anatomy and cytology. 'I decided to do a 'restart' in my academic life, and I was really interested in medicine, but I didn't want to become a doctor, so I found that degree, which seemed really interesting to me [...]'. At the end of the VET programme (27 years) she started working as a lab technician and since then she has not stopped working in this field: 'since I ended up here, I have not stopped working. I've had no time to pause, I have not missed work'. She is currently working at a private foundation as a lab technician: 'My working rank is a 'higher laboratory technician', and my contract is linked to different projects or scholarships, that may be from the government, the Ministry or private foundations. [...] You are signing contracts from year to year, six months to six months and what you do is go changing depending on which institution granted

the scholarship, which project or what kind of institution. It may be clinical hospital, University of Barcelona, UB Foundation, or different things.'

5.6.6.1. *Significant work and learning transitions*

She felt that her VET certificate in administrative assistance was too common. A lot of people have the that qualification because it was one of the most requested professional profiles in Spain in the 90's so she decided to take a new step and start university studies in statistics. Without finishing her university degree she decided to start a VET course in pathologic anatomy and cytology. She was very interested in medicine but she did not want to become a doctor. This transition was the result of a bad experience during her university internship. She worked at a company which did faculty assessments, and at one point she was asked to modify some data to improve some teachers' qualifications. She felt disappointed with the profession.

However, she considered that all the transitions were positive. She really appreciated all the facilities given by the school where she attended the VET course in pathologic anatomy and the employment opportunities provided. She pointed out that many of the skills needed to do her jobs have been gained through work experience and not through her studies. This happens in countries like Spain where the use of learning and training programmes related to work and effective guidance services are not widespread (Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale et al., 2012).

The transition from the VET course to her job as an anatomy lab technician was the most important in her life. She felt lucky because of the opportunity of working in an area that she really wanted to. At the beginning it was stressful because she felt she had the tools but not the experience and that blocked her.

5.6.6.2. *Linking transitions to work, learning and skill development*

Anna is a person who has research skills. She likes to learn to do the job she does. She likes to learn and says that to do the job she does you have to have concerns and an interest in learning because if not you are left behind: 'for example if you find out something, and you question yourself, then you start reading and find out more things. Then you find out something small, and question yourself why and then you find yourself in a loop and there are people who like that.'

She thinks this ability and her research capability and the will to continuously learn is through her family. She stated that most of the knowledge she has acquired have been while in the job positions at work. She works in a self-taught manner. She gave an example that the VET studies she did were old-fashioned. 'Old people will be teaching, teaching old-fashioned techniques. Then I was studying while the design of the studies was being reviewed'. She stressed that

she likes to continue with learning because if not she feels trapped 'If I don't learn I feel trapped, then I do not advance. I do not improve and I don't like this situation'. Her research ability and her curious mind have led her to be almost leading the research in her working group and she likes that.

Her research ability has not always given her satisfaction. Anna explained that in her prior job she had little possibility of development. She recalled with disappointment that she had little decision-making authority. While in contrast in her current job she has greater responsibilities so that she enjoys her job more. When asked why she likes to have so much freedom to be able to work she replied 'because if not I would be a robot and I won't have imagination'. She is a person that likes very much the area of medicine and sciences in general. When asked if it is a question of profession or if she likes to help others she simply replies that it is a professional matter: 'I never had in mind to help others, but when you are ok and learning that with your work that this helps others to be well. I know that what I do is to help others, but I am not a hypocrite I work to live, not to help others. But the reality is that my job has consequences, which is to help others.'

5.6.6.3. *Linking significant learning experience to career and labour market transitions*

On a personal level her major transition was the change from the VET of medium level as an administrator at a university because of the responsibility it involved and the needed maturity for the transition. On a professional level it was changing from university to the VET programme on health for the satisfaction of doing something that she really enjoyed.

She stressed that the most satisfactory aspect of the transitions is to do what you really want to do and what you like and, therefore, the transition really responds to your motivations. One unsatisfactory aspect of her transitions Anna said was the transition to university because her class did not have the needed level to start a first university school year. As a result they had to adapt the contents of the first year curriculum in the middle of the university year. She, with the others of her class, were the first students of the Spanish educational reform LOGSE that began in the decade of the 1990s, which among other things enlarged the compulsory education from 14 to 16 years old, and reformed the Bachillerato and VET courses (Head of State, 1990). When she decided to go from university to a VET of higher level her grades and higher education were not taken into account. Anna thinks this is negative. Both in the current law of education as well as the prior ones the grade to decide the entrance in a VET of higher level is the grade of the VET medium level or the result of the exam of access (Head of State, 2006).

There is a factor in her transitions that deeply defines her future working life. She explains that when she started studying the VET on medicine she did it thinking to become a forensic technician but she felt that there was a higher discrimination against women on this area. Anna explained that the discrimination focused on the weight of the bodies which were considered to be too much for some women and with this they justified the fact that entrance to that specialty was limited only to men: 'Basically when I studied the VET of medicine I wanted to become a, forensic technician but then they started saying that if to move a dead body was too heavy they would hire men first rather than women because of the strength that they usually have but well then I started seeking to do research and there I have not found discrimination.'

Anna explained in addition that in another hospital where she did an internship they also only hired men because they stated that: 'They did not hire women because you have to work with foetuses with the explanation that this may affect women with some kind of psychological trauma if they wanted to be mothers. They were resistant to hire women and they argued that.'

The fact of being a woman Anna stated has affected her in some moments of her life. Now she does not feel that this situation affects her so directly. However, she stated that in her job there is a lot of sexism: 'For example, to occupy higher decision-making positions for the fact of being a woman you have to demonstrate it more. They will always choose as the head of the department a man before a woman because men were the ones taking the decisions and because in higher positions the responsibility positions are led by men.'

The fact of having suffered this disappointment in the internship while studying statistics made her think about her future plans for a job and her academic future plans, and changing in the process her personal academic path. Maybe in the beginning the fact of leaving the statistics degree was only a negative fact, but however, in the long term she highly valued it as a positive transition because she could start again from the beginning another labour and academic path.

'I changed my branch of knowledge, I changed everything and I suppose that this made me change as a person. Therefore this is a fact that I highlight as positive and besides things did not go as well as until the moment, I would still have done something to change my path and not to feel blocked.'

Besides somehow for not having an academic qualification she feels that there was a moment when she felt professionally blocked in her current job. She also stated that she is dependent on the team of people that are around her because they can give her many responsibilities: 'There is a moment in which you are trapped, then you cannot advance more. But then depending on the team in which you work with they give you more responsibilities. Even acting as a doctor without being a doctor (leading research).'

This is not the common practice but there have been situations in which individuals without the qualification of doctorate are leading or co-leading research.

5.6.6.4. *Nature of support for most significant work and/or learning transition(s)*

Anna has always asked for advice from her parents and some friends. At the centre where she studied the VET of higher level the students received advice on labour market orientation during the last month. This has been considered effective by several authors³. Besides this support she also had other professional and personal support. Anna believes that you have to have during a transition the people that are most relevant in your life and never forget about oneself, and how important this is for oneself. Regarding family support she always highlighted the support received when she left her studies in statistics. Anna also highlighted the financial support she received through working since she finished her first VET course. She explains that her family always shared with her the different options to do things, for example, to study or not. They let her decide and she always had the last word on her transitions both in the labour market and in education. In addition her family has helped her to acquire knowledge but also let her have the freedom to decide. Although she recognised that without her family education she would have not acquired many of her competences. Her transition from the university to the VET of higher level marked a radical change as she started from zero when she was 26 in a new field and another professional path different from before, which sometimes made her feel not well with herself. She feels that without the support of her family she would have not been able to make that change.

5.6.6.5. *Future development: future plans, career and individual orientation*

Anna would have loved to have become a forensic technician, she states that from childhood she liked this field of medicine: 'When I use to go with my mother to the market we use to go to a stand in which the seller was my mother's friend. And although it can seem cruel, she kept for me the heads of the rabbits for me to open and look at. I don't know I have always had curiosity for sciences and mathematics. I have always liked them.'

When asked about her future plans she thinks that she may finish off her degree in statistics at the university. This is because, as she says, in her job you can improve your position by publishing articles on things that the labs find out which she already has done. Therefore what she lacks right now is the academic qualification: 'I have now several articles already published and I am missing the studies for the doctorate and being able to hold a doctorate. Yes sometimes I have also thought of studying some degree such as biomedicine or something like that. But then I have my age. You have to take care of some basic needs.

Now you do not want to be living with your parents. You want to have a family and this requires financial support.'

When she left statistics to change to another work area is when by chance she discovered the VET in medicine 'I said to myself, well, I will try, I tried two years, one I did not pass, and the second I was on the waiting list. In several days they called me and let me know that there were some people who were not registering and asked if I wanted to do it'.

At some moment in the future she will leave the research group in which she is currently in because they will not be able to provide her with any more knowledge technically. For the moment I would like to go to another country to work 'I would like to go out because here everything is like burnt, it is all very..., I would like to be somewhere else, see new visions of things. I really want to do this type of change'. She would like to go out supported by the team she works with but if she did not receive their support she would find an alternative. 'I don't care one way or the other, you always try to find the easier way'.

5.6.6.6. *Learning from previous changes and transitions and moving forward*

In all her transitions she has always valued being able to do what she likes and to be able to decide by herself. At the same time that she feels supported, 'I have always required a lot from myself [...] I have never had fear'. To be able to do these transitions her strategy has been to analyse in depth the change, the benefits and the prejudices of the transition. She will recommend to anyone doing a transition to go for a field or topic that they like and are personally motivated towards. Although she acknowledges that now with the crisis it is very difficult to advise that. When Anna is asked about the usefulness of her time at the university she dismisses any type of contribution although she highlighted that she uses statistics in her job. 'In sciences, you do experiments and you have to study if the results are significant and there you use statistics'. But she recalled that she felt deceived by the discipline when in the internship she saw a manipulation of data that affected her enormously.

'With statistics you can achieve many results and it is easy to use it and because it is easy to do it is also possible to manipulate it to obtain other results. That was a moment in which I did not believe in the field of study'. This situation taught her to be more sceptical and not to believe things and she provides the example of the political polls.

Anna explained that she still has to learn a lot in her job and that fortunately her company offers many training possibilities such as seminars, courses and conferences. The company has different resources to help pay for courses and there are some courses in which she is highly interested in that she is thinking to pay for from her own pocket. But what she mainly does are the seminars. She stressed that she was lucky when finding the job because since she took the VET

courses she has been working in her current job now for four years. The most important job experience she had to be where she is now was one she had in cardiology because it stimulated her capacity of thinking. They asked her about her opinion on given topics and she had to provide ideas and themes. This helped her in the long term to stimulate her learning. She explained that from that labour experience all her jobs have been in that direction. For her the labour market experience is fundamental to be able to do her job in comparison to education because the experiences have provided her with tools for working that the education did not: 'In the VET programme they teach you the basics. They teach you about what is red, blue or yellow. But in the job position they teach you that with blue and yellow you do orange [...] you have more open vision. In the studies you receive the basics and then you have to build the house so to say.'

Although she has stated that her time at the university was not satisfactory she highlights that is important for her not being trapped that is why she would like to continue studying to be able to do a doctorate that will let her continue becoming established in her job.

5.6.6.7. *Other relevant factors that have an influence in work and learning transitions*

She reflected on and compared the educational system of ESO (compulsory secondary education post-1990 reform) to EGB (basic general education pre-1990 reform) (the one she received). Anna considers that ESO is a lower education level that does not promote students to think which influences their decisions and labour transitions. She explained how she sees students attending the lab on internships and she is aware of their lack of level.

5.6.6.8. *Summary*

All her working and educational moves were due to personal motivation, and she said that 'I always want to learn more, I don't like being static'. Her working transitions were oriented to learn new things and increase her abilities and knowledge in cytology and pathologic anatomy. Her academic transitions have been totally influenced by her interests and personal motivations. She has always been changing to acquire necessary academic knowledge to be able to continue as a professional in the positions that she prefers, and in those that suits her best. However, she did experience gender inequality at work as she was not able to do the job she really wanted to do as a forensic technician and she still regrets this. She enjoys learning and has developed a strong learner identity. Her involvement in lifelong learning has given her happiness. She has always wanted to learn things and never to settle and this has been the main factor which has kept her going throughout her studies.

5.7. Key Factors from Spain

Several key factors can be identified which have facilitated successful learning transitions for individuals in the labour market in Spain. Many of the participants shared similar learning biographies in that the majority left school and entered some form of vocational (VET) training and they came from working class backgrounds. Not all of them ended up in jobs in the same field as their VET training and some took factory jobs for pragmatic reasons as the pay was higher. Jobs were available in their vocational training area but they chose higher paid but less skilled jobs in factories instead. Many took their first steps towards learning and making a work transition because of dissatisfaction with the nature of their job and conditions. This was particularly the case for those working in factories as the work became alienating and also affected some people's health. They wanted more fulfilling work, self-development and professional satisfaction. Learning and education offered the means to achieve this. The majority believed that a university degree was the best option but first had to overcome the hurdle of passing the 25+ entrance exam. They were all the first generation in their family to go to university. Others took the national exams for entry into the civil service as this pathway was viewed as providing a secure job. Most embarked on work transitions to change their jobs and this often involved undergoing several transitions over a period of years but also many wanted a better quality of life and well-being. Those that are still undergoing a transition mentioned that they have already noticed an improvement in their quality of life so that it is about professional well-being and personal well-being. Transitions are about identity building and not only a labour market identity but also a self-identity.

In the past few years reforms have helped to improve the permeability of the VET system and the education system more broadly. This has enabled some of these participants to undergo more than one learning transition as well transitions between different educational sectors.

Social networks, social capital and the support of family and friends played a critical role in helping individuals to cope with the learning transitions. Every time they made a work transition their networks widened while also maintaining contact with old colleagues and friends. The social networks functioned in several ways. First, family and friends were critical in offering encouragement and support in making the decision to undergo a transition and boosting confidence and this continued while they were experiencing the transition. For some their social networks were instrumental in informing them about jobs. Family and partners in particular provided emotional support as well as resources such as finance and practical every day support. The strong role that families play may reflect the importance which the family has in Spanish society.

All recognised the critical role of formal education, particularly a university degree, but they also stressed that informal learning through everyday work

practices and interaction with fellow workers was more important to them as it was viewed as 'real learning'. Formal learning provided the qualifications for getting a job and theoretical knowledge but many felt that it was too abstract for their professions. For those working with people social and communication skills are needed as well as practical experience. Their learning experiences, both formal and informal, enabled them to become independent learners. All enjoyed their engagement with learning and developed a learning identity and dispositions which enabled them to cope and succeed. It is important that learning opportunities are available for adults both through formal educational institutions such as universities and through workplace learning. Employers, however, need to encourage and support their staff in learning and promote policies and practices towards this. Their learning biographies illustrate the importance of lifelong learning in facilitating labour market transitions.

Higher education played a pivotal role in the labour market transition of many of these participants as they regard a degree as being essential to moving upwards in the labour market. However, access to university for adults in Spain is limited as they have to take a difficult entrance exam for which they have to study and prepare for. There is also a quota system on the number of adult who are allowed to enter higher education each year. Widening access to higher education would help more adults to engage in labour market transitions.

Many were looking for job security which they felt they did not have in the private sector. This led them to make a transition into the public sector either by taking public sector examinations for a specific public sector job or by studying for a university degree. For some the economic crisis in Spain has prompted them to look for job security through civil service jobs.

The availability of support and career advice and guidance was stated as being crucial in helping someone to change a career trajectory but most felt that in practice it was not available and that policies and practice need to change in relation to this in Spain. Most had to find out relevant information by themselves.

Participants in this study pointed out the importance of individual abilities as a key tool in the process of improvement and transition. These abilities provide them with flexibility and an ability to adapt to the different contexts, transforming these into possibilities for transition and change.

Engaging in a work transition is a risky business. The participants in this study had clear goals of where they wanted to go and who they wanted to become and used their determination, motivation, resilience and agency to get there and their dispositions also helped them to cope with the struggles they experienced along the way. Being agentic was a critical factor for many in this study. Agency was used, despite the structural constraints of the economy, to make a positive change to their working lives and careers which when successfully achieved impacted upon other aspects of their lives for the better.

Their biographies illuminate that through learning and work transitions they experienced social mobility but this did not distance them from friends and family. Some are still considering further work transitions but recognise that they may need to be more cautious in the future because of the economic crisis in Spain.

Abbreviation list

SGP	social guarantee programme
VIP	vocational initiation programmes
UNED	Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia [National Distance Education University]
UGT	Unión General de Trabajadores [General Union of Workers]
CEOE	Confederación Española de organizaciones empresariales [Spanish confederation of business organisations]
CEPYME	Confederación Española de la pequeña y mediana empresa [Spanish confederation of Small and medium sized enterprise]
CCOO	Confederación sindical de comisiones obreras [trade union confederation of workers' commissions]
EPA	encuesta de población activa [survey of active population]
INE	Instituto Nacional de Estadística [National Institute of Statistics]

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